

THE USE OF CLAY THERAPY IN YOUNG CHILDREN FROM  
DIVORCED HOMES IN KLEIN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

by

MARTHA JACOBA DANNHAUSER

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**I dedicate this work to my biggest inspiration, my father**

**Karel Steenkamp Dannhauser**

**24-01-1952 to 20-08-2010**

**Thank you for always believing in and dreaming with me.**

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## **Summary**

I became aware of the frequency of the traumatic effect of parental divorce on the lives of the children involved. My research intervention is investigating what value working with clay as therapeutic medium could have for young children from divorced homes.

I used non-directive instruction to see whether it enabled children to relate and express their personal experiences more easily . Some children seemed hesitant about projecting their own emotions onto the clay models but, in the end, rich information and spontaneous communication was achieved.

The analysis and interpretation of the data from the therapy sessions clearly showed the value of using clay as a therapeutic medium when working with children from divorced homes. By expressing and sharing feelings and emotions experienced during and after parental divorce, the participants indicated that it helped them to work through guilt and other issues, and to come to terms with the reality of the changes in their lives.

### **Title of thesis:**

THE USE OF CLAY THERAPY IN YOUNG CHILDREN FROM  
DIVORCED HOMES IN KLEIN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

### **Key terms**

Young children; Children of divorce/ divorced children; Effects of divorce; Nuclear family; Clay; Clay therapy; Emotions; Verbal and nonverbal language; Paralanguage; Observation.

## DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

**Student number: 42561698**

I declare that **THE VALUE OF CLAY IN THERAPY WITH YOUNG CHILDREN FROM DIVORCED HOMES** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

(MS M J Dannhauser)

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DATE

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## CHAPTER 1

### The Introduction to my study

*“Children are often the forgotten grievers.” – David Kessler*

*“I have been working with children utilizing CLAY therapy techniques over the past decade and have found it to be the most powerful and effective clinical tool yielding extraordinary therapeutic outcomes. It’s like magic!” Todd Tratnik*

*“Play is the royal road to the child’s conscious and unconscious inner world; if we want to understand his inner world and help him with it, we must learn to walk this road.” Bettelheim (1987:35)*



## THE INTRODUCTION

### Awareness

While teaching at a primary and secondary school I first became aware of the high ratio of children whose parents were divorced or remarried. The reality of dealing with parents’ divorce and often remarrying coupled with step siblings and all issues related this became a daily topic of conversation in class. As some parents enquired how to best handle children’s reaction and dealing of parents’ divorce, I decided I

must broaden my knowledge on this as it is such a general topic dealt with by children I encounter every day. Because I never personally experienced the break-up of my parents' marriage, I did not know what a huge impact and life changing experience a divorce has on children. This pricked my curiosity on the topic and I started to gather books, papers and any source I could get my hands on about divorce.

While reading up on divorce and children I stumbled upon shocking statistics. According to Statistics South Africa (2009:3) 30 763 divorces were recorded in South Africa. Recent published data (Statistics South Africa 2009:30) proved there were 28 295 children involved in divorce and 17 214 (fifty six percent) of the total divorce cases had children younger than 18 years involved. After reading this, I realized that the reality of divorce happening to more than half of learners in a class I was teaching is no unfamiliar circumstance. The fact that divorce became a much more general part of life in this day and age could be greatly ascribed to moral reasons. By moral reasons I mean that in the past divorce was often viewed as no option or in very serious problematic situations as the very last option, mainly because it was morally not accepted in communities (Hughes 2005:58). People were often abandoned out of certain social circles and the church banned/"punished" divorced couples by placing them on censure/censorship (forbid the use of the sacraments) for certain periods of time. Hughes (2005:55) believes that this attitude of social unacceptability changed considerable in the last decade as could be evident in the fact that separation and divorce is much more accepted and is easily viewed as an option if difficulty in the relationship arises. His beliefs were proven in recent survey statistics where separation and divorce of couples increased considerably in the last decade (Statistics South Africa 2009:4).

The above made me aware of the fact that I closely work with these children every day, unaware of their huge emotional load and concerns, and lead to my decision to do a deeper investigation on children's experience of divorce. After consulting a number of sources I concluded that most recorded literature is based on the adults' and adolescent's experience of divorce and little on younger children's experience of divorce. The most evident reason why there is little written on the young child's experience of divorce could be because they cannot express the emotions they experience during their parents' divorce. In the past the majority sources made use of the traditional method of verbally interviewing clients concerning traumatic experiences when working with adults, adolescents and children. As could be expected, younger children often don't have the necessary vocabulary and proved to have difficulty expressing their emotions and thoughts verbally and are therefore not recorded in this method of research.

Because of the young child's inability to express themselves verbally, their side of the story was often not recorded or taken into account. Through my literature review I became aware that parents often don't include children's input in divorce proceedings. This could be understood from the parents view as to protect children from hurt, but in the end it is evident that children prefer to be informed and consulted concerning the split up of their family and the associated life changes. In most cases plans have been made and carried out before children become aware that the parents are separating or divorcing (Lewis & Sammons 2000: 24; Troyer 1979:19). The majority children may be aware of the unhappiness and conflict between parents, but few expect their parents to divorce (Orton 1997:46). When taking into consideration all information available from the child's/adolescent's side of what they experienced, it is evident that children and adolescents often suffer immense trauma when parents decide to divorce.

During my literature review, I also became aware that in the past children were not invited to share in decisions regarding living arrangements, contact with the other parent and reasons why parents decided to divorce. The stages of divorce as stipulated in the literature will be discussed in the next few paragraphs.

## **1.1 Background information**

### **Understanding divorce**

Experts suggest that divorce should not be viewed as a single discrete event, but rather studied as a process (Burrett 2002: 231; Wolchik & Karoly 1988:111). Henning (2005:44) states that educational professionals should observe a divorce as a three stage process, where stage one arises when irresolvable conflict and severe problems become evident. This is often the hardest emotional time for children, because one parent leaves and the family break-up becomes reality. The second, transitional stage usually appears when children should accept and adapt to new support structures, living arrangements, schools and friends as a result of parents' separation. It is not uncommon for children and adolescents to be unsure regarding their future at this time in their lives (Henning 2005: 45). The final stage is often when children begin to show more stability, more secure feelings and better acceptance of new family life and living arrangements (Henning 2005: 45).

According to Matthews (1997), a Human Development Specialist at the North Carolina State University, there are other important phases to be aware of when working with divorced families, which will now be discussed.

People working with children of divorce must be aware of the emotional stage when parents decide that the marriage is not working anymore and that there are no other outcomes than divorcing. The realization that negative feelings overshadow the love and affection the couple once had between them and often extreme conflict exists.

Generally when talking about a divorce, people may think that the divorce is the legal procedures of finalising the end of the marriage and that couple are no longer married according to law. What people are usually unaware of is the fact that the economic division of money and property is a highly emotional time for the couple and their children involved.

It is saddening that divorce proceedings don't just involve the couple divorcing, but also involves and affects the children involved. Custody and/or living arrangements could be a very emotional time not only for the parents, but especially the children. The children often experience guilt about living with the one parent and not the other, although it is often not the child's decision to choose where to live. The custody over children could become a major point of conflict between the parties involved (Matthews 1997: 12).

## **1.2 Effects of divorce on children**

Children of divorce are forced to deal with a variety of mixed emotions and radical changes all at once (Botha 2003:2). Only children and adolescents who have experienced this traumatic event first hand will know what hidden effects it could have on your family life as you knew it. Ellis (2000:25) suggests that the child's age, gender and previous coping history will greatly determine how the child will experience and handle the parents' divorce. In the following few paragraphs I would like to highlight some of the short- and long-term effects of divorce on young children.

Burrett (2002: 210) stresses the more conflict there is during the divorce proceedings, the better the chance will be for children to experience problems. Neuman (1998:266) asserts that children between five (5) and years old are in general mostly affected by parents' divorce. As the target group in my research will be between eight (8) and eleven (11) years of age, I will consider the effects of divorce on children within this age group.

For children divorce is experienced as a great loss. Multiple losses during the process of divorce are evident in a child's life. One of the most distressing issues

children have to face is losing their family as they know it, losing one parent in their daily lives and both parents have to change to accommodate their new life situation (Lewis & Sammons 2000:20).

According to Troyer (1979:25) all children going through a divorce experience some period of shock and surprise at the separation. These children are full participants in the divorce and therefore should be given some advance warning to adapt to the changes about to happen in their lives.

Throughout various literature sources the most evident emotions associated with divorce are: denial and relief; insecurity, anxiety and fear; loss; worry and hopelessness; guilt and anger. Children are often aware of what is going on between parents and the conflict patterns evident long before formal divorce proceedings, but they mostly believe that things will get better.

### **1.2.1 Short-term effects**

Throughout the literature (Ellis 2000: 26; Henning 2005:47; Hughes 2009:2; Patten 1999:26; Ayalon 1993:42-46) immediate effects of parents' divorce on young children could include the following symptoms: denial; insecurity and separation anxiety; sadness including crying, sobbing and whining; depression and self-blame; anger and displacement onto other people or objects; rejection of discipline and testing boundaries; manipulating parents by implicating guilt; despair and lastly coping with new circumstances.

As school teachers and other educational professionals may observe there can be a change in the child's academic work, change in homework completion often as a result of less parental supervision, acting out and temper tantrums in class and on the playground; bullying, fighting, withdrawal and other unusual social adjustment difficulties (Neuman 1998:267).

### **1.2.2 Long-term effects**

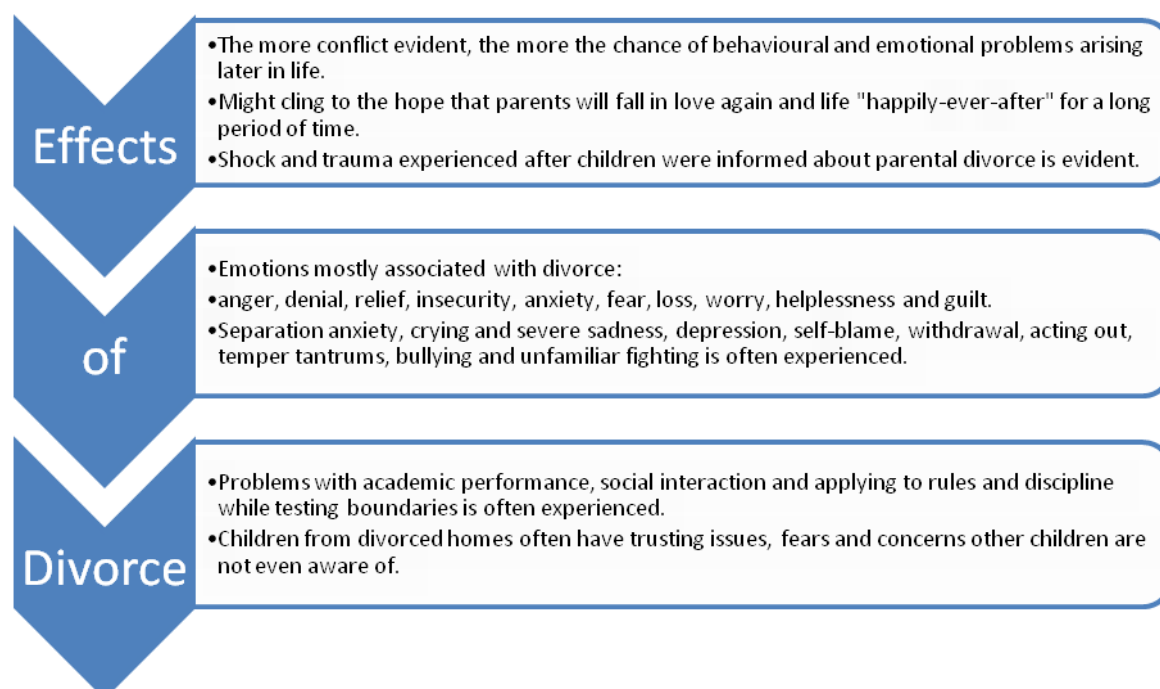
For children to cope with the trauma of divorce, certain facts and feelings are often denied on a subconscious level and therefore "forgotten" in a certain sense. The problem here is that these feelings do not disappear from the child's mind and could always resurface at any point later in life. These repressed issues easily resurface when in a mature relationship themselves. It has been proven that children of divorce often show less trust in romantic relationships, almost as if they feel it is too good to be true and that it is only a matter of time before the relationship will fail and

end up in a break-up. These people have fears and worries within any relationship because of parents' divorce experiences (Amato & Keith 1991:45). Personally, I had trouble understanding why the child from a divorced home has fears and pre-conceived ideas regarding a relationship, because these things did not even cross my mind before.

Throughout the literature review, it was evident that children of divorce will often long for parents to reconcile no matter how long a time has passed since they got separated. This could perhaps be to relocate their lives to before the parents' divorce, because in their minds going back to what they knew as normal would erase all the hurt and sorrow accompanying the divorce. Children of divorce will also often feel they would rather not get married and have children than hurting their own children one day in the chance that they must divorce. Therefore, children of divorce would often have children before marrying. Research proved that children of divorce are also more likely to divorce in their own lives as adults (Wallerstein 1985: 551).

Schematically the effects may look as follows and one can see that the emotional impact is high and this may also result in difficulty cognitive and behavioural functioning of children from divorced homes.

Figure 1.1 Effects of divorce summary



## **1.3 Discovering Alternative Methods of Treatment**

Because of the effects of divorce on young children, I wondered how using clay as therapeutic medium when working with traumatized children could help in their dealing with the situation. One of the methods of using clay in therapy I stumbled upon, is expressive techniques. Clay is used in this regard as the child's pen and paper where the child can freely express emotions and thoughts without necessarily talking.

Art therapy has been used widely with children by art therapists, play therapists, psychologists, medical social workers, clinical counselors, nurses and other health care professionals (Welton 2010:1). It encompasses both the creative process and self-expression as art is recognized for its therapeutic role in helping children coping better with stress (Skophammer 2000:38).

### **1.3.1 Clay therapy**

From the literature evidence exists as to the use of clay as an alternative method to expressing emotions and thoughts with young children.

Researchers (Lee 1995: 19; Schaefer 2003: 11; Masters 2005: 24) working with children saw a need to gain the young child's thoughts and emotions on traumatic events in order to better plan the treatment and goals when facing traumatic, life changing situations of young children. This led educational professionals to change their whole paradigm by going back to the basics of children's development. They tried to connect to younger children on their own emotional and cognitive level rather than doing mature therapy applicable to adults and emotionally mature people. This change in paradigm in turn led to the development and elaboration of play therapy strategies when working with children. A variety of play therapies were being studied and applied in children who suffered the loss of loved ones by death, children of divorce, children with anger and behavioural difficulties and children traumatized by violence. The development, application and uses of a specific play therapy, namely clay therapy, would be dealt with in more detail later in my dissertation.



## **1.4 Problem statement**

In the light of the above, the aim of this research is to investigate the use of clay therapy in young children from divorced homes and determine the value of it in alleviating negative emotions.

The research plans to make use of clay as a therapeutic medium. I want to use prescriptive clay therapy where the child will be instructed to create any sculpture of his/her choice with relevance to the parents' divorce situation. During my research I will make use of alternative methods to express feelings rather than the verbal story telling.

The research question thus is as follows:

**What is the value of using clay in therapy when dealing with children from divorced homes?**

## **1.5 Aims of the study**

In order to answer the research questions, the following aims will guide this study. I will attempt to:

- 1) Do a literature study on the effects of divorce in young children.
- 2) Do a literature study on the use of clay therapy when working with young children.
- 3) Make use of empirical research with purposive sampling to identify children from divorced homes in Windhoek.

This research is aimed at determining the value of using clay techniques as projection medium when used by the divorced child. This can be investigated empirically. The value of using clay techniques when working with children of divorce will be investigated during this research.

The aim of this research will be twofold. Firstly, to see how children project emotions into clay creations and secondly how the interpretation of the clay techniques could have therapeutic value for the client.

I want to use clay to help the child of divorce feel at ease in the therapeutic situation. Children often find it difficult to voice feelings they experience and put them into meaningful words (Skophammer 2000:38). I want to investigate the use of clay as free expression medium to encourage children to express their emotions about divorce of parents. I wish to expand the use of clay as projection medium to be valuable in terms of giving information for the therapist on what and how the child experiences this situation in his life. The significance here is important to view divorce as seen through the child's eyes.

The following could be achieved during the clay activity: the child could realize that the divorce is not their fault or punishment and that they don't have to feel guilty about it. The research process is planned to help the child become aware that they are not the only child dealing with parents' divorce and that the child or children don't have to be ashamed of the situation. By using the clay, I strive towards lightening the emotional load of the child by voicing fears and frustrations about the parents' divorce in a safe, non-judgmental environment. The research is planned to possibly lead to better coping and dealing with the radical changes in the child's life. I also want to evaluate how the clay therapy could contribute to their coping with all the changes and the psychological challenges going with the divorce process.

With completion of my research, I intend to prove the value clay work has as projection medium when used with children of divorce. The projection of emotions and thoughts are evaluated, but also the value of investigating, identifying, naming and dealing with issues related to the divorce.

## **1.6 Research Method**

I choose to use qualitative research as it is most suited for the purpose of my study in terms of especially obtaining specific opinions, emotions, thoughts, feelings and relationships of individuals from a specific population identified, in my case children from divorced homes (Mack,W et al. 2005:1).

I plan to work individually with each participant in order to gain every aspect of the child's verbal and non-verbal behaviour. The therapy sessions will start by giving clay to the participant with minimum instruction on what to do and then let the child's interaction lead to asking open-ended questions applicable to the individual situation. The flexibility in the study is important to me, because I want to observe the child's individual experience and not force predictable questions during the process (Mouton 2001:21).

The research is planned to make use of in-depth interviewing for optimal collection of data in terms of the child's perspective on parents' divorce. Unstructured observation will be used in my study to give a true reflection on what each individual participant's behaviour and interactional patterns were during the sessions (Mertens 2005:382). In my qualitative research design, I will make use of audio and video recordings during the clay therapy sessions with my participants. After collecting the individual experience data, assumptions and conclusions will be made to answer the aims of my research stated below.

The value of achieving the above mentioned goals are expected to benefit both the child and other children in future when encountering the trauma of parents' divorce. The information obtained through observing the verbal and non-verbal cues of the child during the clay therapy process, could lead to helping parents, teachers and other educational professionals with better understanding of divorced children's behaviour and experiences in future therapy settings.

I will attempt to:

- a) Use qualitative data in the form of audio and video recordings to investigate each participant's individual experience of parents' divorce.
- b) Use in-depth interviews for collecting data on participant's perspectives, particularly when dealing with such a sensitive topic as divorce through using clay as therapeutic medium. Open-ended questions will be used to allow a less formal setting and more spontaneous interaction between myself and the participants. The participants will be given the opportunity to respond in their own words and experiences with the necessary ethics considered.
- c) Unstructured observation will be used to reflect on what I observe about a participant's behaviour and interactional patterns. A range of observations will be done in addition to documenting emotions and feelings, participant's body language and other information will be observed for holistically understanding the young child's experience of divorce.

To fit the aims of this research design, qualitative research will be used. I will use clay as a projective medium on the young child of divorce to determine how the child experience divorce and in what manner the child could benefit from expressing feeling into clay work rather than just verbally expressing emotions . This method will allow me and other professionals in the field of Education and Psychology to get information from the child's side about the divorce in a wholly unique context. I plan

to observe the following for therapeutic value:

- The verbal and non-verbal expressions and language used by the participants;
- Emotions and thoughts expressed during the interviews;
- Needs and concerns expressed during the interviews.

## **1.7 Ethical Considerations**

As I plan to work with a very sensitive topic, ethical considerations must be identified sufficiently. Participants in my research will be expected to benefit from the knowledge gained through this research study (Mack 2005:9). The important ethical considerations will be discussed briefly here and in more detail in Chapter Three.

A form stipulating the necessary information will be used to gain written consent from parents and children to ensure respect and justice for persons and community where possible. Participant's identity will be kept confidential to protect them from any psychological or physical harm and I, as the researcher, will commit to minimize the risk associated with my specific research and strive to maximize benefits for the participants (Mack 2005:9).

Respect for individual participants and respect for communities I am going to work with is important and I strive to ensure confidentiality of all information gained during therapy sessions to protect participants from any psychological and physical harm known (Mack 2005:9).

## **1.8 Delineations and Limitations**

As prescribed by the research board my dissertation will be done within limited scope. Therefore limitations will be discussed which I foresee my research will most probably not achieve.

Firstly, this study will not deal with all age groups of children and adolescents. The researcher will focus on children in primary school ranging between 8 and 11 years old, as evaluating children of all ages will be too wide and time consuming. The researcher chose primary school children, because from the literature review it is evident that most research done in regard with divorce was done on adolescents. This is also the main reason why the researcher chose clay therapy as medium,

because it could lead to new insights from non-verbal as well as verbal behaviours of young children.

Secondly, the researcher does not foresee that her research will lead to new changes regarding treatment for children of divorce, but rather to list and analyze the experiences throughout the child's experience. Here the raw information of how a child feels, thinks and behaves during parents' divorce, is important in the research. This research is aimed at identifying normal behaviours in an abnormal situation, in this instance the divorce. I do not think my research will lead to a whole new program when dealing with children of divorce, but rather to treat the "here and now" emotions of the child faced with divorce of parents. My prediction is that the clay will assist children to voice their feelings and emotions about the divorce, thus initiating the way they work through related issues.

Thirdly, my research is limited in the sense that it would probably not provide samples of sculptures to evaluate for future therapists' treatment of children facing the process of divorce. I predict that each child's feelings and emotions will be different and that the projecting of emotions and issues into the clay work could only be evaluated in taking the child's whole life story and behaviours into consideration. I think there would be some form of identifying similarities between most divorced children's sculptures, but that it is of importance to make use of the holistic view of each child's personal circumstances.

## **1.9 Definitions of terms and concepts**

Child/childhood: young human not yet reached the age of majority (Butler et al. 2002:14).

Children: a small boy or girl human being between birth and puberty (Reber et al. 2009:126).

Young child: in this study relating to children aged between eight (8) and eleven (11) years of age.

Children of divorce/Divorced children: children whose parents are separated and live apart (Statistics South Africa 2009:3).

Clay therapy: Using clay as therapeutic medium for diagnosis purposes where the child's behaviour and communication is observed for specific social, emotional or functioning difficulties (Reber et al. 2009: 592).

Divorce/Divorced homes: break up of marriage setup between two partners, usually separation of husband and wife (Statistics South Africa 2009:2).

Emotions: any strong feeling (for example anger, joy, sadness, happiness etc.) directed towards a specific object. Experiencing emotions usually lead to physiological and behavioural changes in the person's body (Reber et al. 2009:258).

Verbal Language: Expressing oneself in spoken words (Reber et al. 2009:858).

Non-verbal Language/communication: the way in which the person uses their body and environment to communicate their feelings regarding a specific object or situation (Reber et al. 2009:858).

Paralanguage: the use of communicative non-verbal language to express meaning and emotions (Statistics South Africa 2009:1).

Nuclear family: a basic social unit consisting of a husband and wife usually living together with their child/children (Reber et al. 2009:289).

Observation: paying careful attention to previously determined detail (Encarta World English Dictionary 1999:1305).

Play clay/dough: elastic medium made to enable a child/adult to sculpt living objects from.

## **1.9 Brief Chapter Overviews**

### **Chapter 1: Orientation to the study**

At the beginning of this study, I will make use of background information to relate where the need arose for this specific topic of research. I will do an in-depth investigation on the effects of divorce, specifically short term and long term effects for later referring back to it when working with the participants. Then I will look at alternative methods of treatment when working with young children from divorced homes, especially focusing on clay therapy as it will be the therapeutic medium used in this research. Then the aims and ethical considerations as well as the delineations and limitations will be combined for later answering of the research statement.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review on the Effects of Divorce on Children**

In the literature review I will discuss the use, knowledge and understanding when using the term divorce in this research. The effects of parental divorce on young children will be discussed with the relevance of short term and long term effects often experienced by children from divorced homes. As a summary, the effects mostly associated with children from divorced homes will then be done. In combination with the effects mostly associated, I will make use of Ayalon and Flasher's (1993) possible reactions to parental divorce. After Ayalon and Flasher's phases (1993), I will widen on the potential risk factors when dealing with children from divorce homes. Because of relevance, the debate of involving or not involving children in living and visiting arrangements according to Singer (2010) would then be discussed. To conclude the literature review chapter the reasons for choosing the target group and severity of divorce for the young child will be explained.

### **Chapter 3: Research Method and Data Collection**

In the research chapter the research design, methodology and participant selection will be explained as planned. The research methods, data collection and analysis will be done and lastly the limitations and ethical procedures and considerations will be discussed at the end.

### **Chapter 4: My Data Analysis and Interpretation of Research Findings**

In this chapter, the analysis, interpretations, representations, findings and final conclusions will be done in detail.

## Chapter 5: The Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

In the final chapter, I will discuss a short summary of the findings achieved with this research study. The conclusions will be drawn on the research findings and the limitations of the study will be discussed in more detail. Then the contributions of the study will be explained as well as the implications and recommendations for further research options. Lastly, the final observations will be the end of my research study.



## CHAPTER 2:

### Literature review on the effects of divorce on children

**“When young children are traumatized, their age often prevents them from complete mastery and understanding of their emotions”  
Monahan 1993:141-142**



## Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will review and state relevant literature on divorce, circumstances leading to divorce, affects and effects of parental divorce on children. The following will be highlighted:

### 2.1 Knowledge and understanding of divorce

Research proved over a quarter of children will experience parental divorce by the time they turn sixteen (16) years of age (Office for National Statistics 2009:44, 18; Butler et al. 2002:11). It is evident from various literature sources (Burrett 2002:21; Ellis 2000:2; Braude & Francisco-La Grange 1993:130) the reality of divorce is not an

uncommon situation regarding families in our community. Only after I became aware that the break-up of families are a common aspect in today's life, did I realize it is affecting more children in our classrooms than could be expected. The most evident reasons why more and more married couples divorce in today's society will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Butler et al (2002:11) gives the following reasons why divorce rates increased:

- 1) Women are more independent than in the past and this leads to better economic opportunities and decisions available to them. Previously, few women had the financial stability to divorce when a marriage fails, because most women stayed at home raising the children.
- 2) The legal act and law on divorce is less complicated and less time consuming than it was previously. Therefore the legal system assists couples to separate quicker and easier.
- 3) With change in society's beliefs and morals, less people feel morally obligated to stay married because of religious reasons.
- 4) The effects of unhappy marriages is better known and therefore couples know that staying together for the children's sake could in the long run have a worse effect on all the parties involved.
- 5) The law concerning actions against women and children's violence is better developed. Human legal rights are more known to the public, more readily available and gives people trapped in these situations the chance to leave when faced with alcoholism, domestic violence or any other unfair treatment.

- 6) People in today's society are more aware of emotional fulfillment and achieving the best one could be and therefore could more easily make a decision to escape a marriage if it is straining their needs and desires.

Classen (2010:40) states that after death, divorce should be seen as one of the worst forms of loss encountered in human life. This could be assigned to the fact that more children in our schools today are personally affected and traumatized by the break-up of families as a result of divorce when compared to children personally affected by the death of a parent and/or sibling (Holland 2008:18). When faced with these high rates of divorce affecting children in our schools, the understanding and possible treatment of children from divorced homes is a big need in school communities. This lured me towards firstly investigating the long- and short term effects of parental divorce on children between eight (8) and eleven (11) years old. Secondly, I want to view the previous treatment in therapeutic settings of children living through parents' divorce and separation process.

James and James (1999:202) argue that children may often be affected by and react differently towards parents' divorce situation. They state the importance of observing all the circumstances leading to the divorce, rather than concentrating on the divorce occurrence itself, when working with children from divorced homes. I will acknowledge the fact that children may respond differently to the announcement of parental divorce, even in the case of siblings in one household who encounter the same divorce situation. Individuality will be taken into account when working with research participants to acknowledge each child's own, unique experience and emotions concerning their parents' divorce.

In my research, I acknowledge the fact that divorce is not a once off event happening in the court room, but rather as stated by Matthews (1997:1) a process happening over time. I will build my study on the fact that the divorce does not only affect the

couple ending their relationship and marriage, but that the break-up of a family has consequences for all persons involved, especially children, with unchangeable effects on almost all aspects of each family members' lives.

## **2.2 Defining “Divorce”**

In the next few paragraphs Matthews' (1997:2) explains different facets of what is meant with divorce and it will be discussed to avoid any confusion.

- 1) In this study, when referring to divorce, one could be talking about legal divorce proceedings as done by the couple ending their marriage. When referring to this facet of divorce one usually means the starting of divorce proceedings with a lawyer in order to finally get the legal documentation stating that the couple are no longer married according to law.
- 2) When using the term divorce, people can refer to emotional turmoil encountered when a marriage relationship is ended. The break-down and destruction of the emotional relationship between a husband and wife usually happens over time and often involves a variety of problems and frustrations encountered over years. During this time is often when couples start fighting over unnecessary things encountered in their daily lives. Feelings of irritation, anger, frustration and hatred are often experienced during this time according to Matthews (1997:3). Usually during this emotional time, one or both parties realize they don't want to live together as a married couple anymore.
- 3) Divorce usually involves economic changes regarding living and spending costs.

- a) The amount of money earned by both parents prior to divorce compared to one parent's income after divorce must be recognized.
- b) Other economic factors include the division of goods collected during the course of married years and dividing assets and property among the couple. The division of property is usually a big part of divorce proceedings and may accompany a variety of emotional reactions by all persons involved. Children are often involved in this emotional turmoil as they experience the conflict between parents over divorce settlements.
- c) This emotional turmoil could also affect children's living and visiting arrangements following the divorce. Where children are concerned, if parents cannot make clear suitable decisions regarding children's living arrangements, the court of law usually decide among fair divorce settlements and place children in the most suitable parent's custody.

In this research it is assumed that children will refer to divorce, describing the event of one parent "leaving the home". The term divorce will include the whole experience of ending parents' marriage as well as the consequences of the break-up of a family as a result of divorce.

## 2.3 Effects of Parental Divorce on Children

**"Numerous research studies suggest that the trauma of divorce remains with children throughout their entire lives" (Singer 2010:9)**

Various critiques exist in the literature (Botha 2003:17); (Smith & Smith 2000); (James & James 1999) about the possibility of effects of parental divorce on the young child. These different perspectives relevant to my study are:

- i. The above mentioned critiques are of the meaning that parental divorce does not necessarily lead to the development of certain emotional and behavioural problems in young children;
- ii. They are also of the meaning that parental divorce increases a child's proneness to certain emotional and behavioural problems throughout the child's live.

Although I agree with critiques that parental divorce may not be assumed as the reason for a child's misbehavior and emotional difficulties, I want to observe possible difficulties children face when their lives are disrupted with parents' divorce.

### **2.3.1 Short term effects of divorce on children**

Kalter and Schreier (1993:41) argues that people, especially children, will show different reactions towards the same traumatic event in their lives. Some common emotional reactions can include sadness, crying, depressed, loss of motivation for everyday life, expressing aggression, temper tantrums and acting out, over dependency on a parents' or caregiver, scared, stress, negatively influencing academic performance, disturbed social interaction and negative outlook on life.

Research (Johnson 2000; Bilotta 2010:3) done on divorce and children concludes that the most evident emotions children experienced during and after parental divorce were feelings of rejection by one or both parents, fear of being abandoned and feeling vulnerable and fragile because of parental divorce for most parts of their lives. Other emotions often expressed by children of divorce are anger and blame on parents for not trying harder in their marriage, fears and issues in love and later marriage relationships because of parental divorce. Children from divorced homes are often observed as having less happy overall psychological well-being throughout life (Holland 2008; Singer 2010; Cashmore 2003; Botha 2003; Smith & Smith 2000).

With all the trauma and life changes of parental divorce, the new life usually means that children, especially the older children in the house, have to accept responsibilities not previously necessary. As a result of less income and the fact that the single-parent must work, children are usually forced to take on greater responsibility with regard to household chores, doing homework on their own and usually assisting parents with looking after and caring for younger siblings. This often leads to the older child experiencing less love, care and attention than before parental divorce.

Teachers and other educational professionals will agree that a significant change in the child's concentration, mood in terms of previously unknown aggression and/or anxiousness, oversensitivity, change in normal socializing manners and overall decline in academic performance are usually observed with parental divorce (Ayalon 1993:34).

### **2.3.2 Long term effects of divorce on children**

Many researchers (Archard 1993:13; Butler et al 2002: 12; James & Prout 1997: 27; Lee 2001:30; Singer 2010:9) agree that the effect and hurt of parental divorce and the break-up of a family stays with the child throughout life and will most probably influences his/her own life in terms of relationships and later marriage choices. Children from divorced homes often have fears and issues regarding specific events as a result of their parents' quarreling and/or conflicts. These fears and issues could interfere with normal relationship development between two people, because the person from a divorced home may show insecurity and unpleasantness at certain stages in relationship development, where the person who grew up in a married home may not even be aware of the dangers or possible pitfalls in a relationship. The fears and issues resulting from parental divorce may lead to conflict and often children from divorced homes would rather not take the risk of getting hurt and thereby remain outside of a committed relationship (Singer 2010; Lee 2001 and Butler et al. 2002).

### **2.3.3 Effects Mostly Associated With Children of Divorce**

From the research done by James & James (1999:14) the following can be concluded:

- Children from divorced homes may be at a greater risk to develop behavioural problems in their lives and may have difficulty adapting in new surroundings as a result of their feelings of inferiority when compared to children from happy homes.
- Children of divorce may show more proneness to failure in school and often shows anxiety, aggression and self-blame when their parents divorce.
- Children who have gone through parental divorce may be more prone to physical illnesses, because of a weak immune system caused by too much stress and strain on the child's body. They can easily develop some form of psychological problems throughout life.
- Feelings often expressed by children from divorced homes are loneliness, depression, disrupted sleeping and eating habits and they may be more prone to alcoholism and suicide in their life.



## **2.4 Ayalon- and Flashers' Phases of Reactions Towards Parental Divorce**

### **First phase:**

Children's initial shock and trauma when informed of parents' decision to separate and divorce can often lead to a phase of imbalance, feeling unsafe and insecurity. During this initial phase it is common to observe feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, severe sadness and often grief and/or mourning over life before divorce when working with children. This phase of imbalance is often characterized by unfamiliar separation anxiety and clinginess to a parent or caregiver of a child as described by Ayalon- and Flasher (1993:42). Other possible reactions observed during this phase include children showing mood changes previously not characterized in the child's nature; daydreaming during school and at home and often observed confusion and disorientation of the child not normally observed (Ayalon- and Flasher 1993:42).

### **Second phase:**

This phase is often characterized by denying the separation and divorce situation. Children currently in this phase will often deny the whole situation by saying the parents are still happily married and confirm their family life is well with parents and children living in one house. Denial in the form of avoiding social interaction and not taking responsibility of their activities are often seen in this phase. The child may manipulate situations where they should complete activities in class and at home as a defense mechanism to cope with the reality of divorce. Children (and often adults) may use denial of the situation to avoid accepting the reality of changes in life as they know it. By denying the current situation, the child has time to come to terms emotionally and get used to the divorce situation. Ayalon- and Flasher (1993:43) also mentions that fantasizing about the typical "happy family" previously known and grief over life as it were before divorce are not uncommon in this phase as a possible reaction.

**Third phase:**

This phase is manifested when children try to find answers and reasons why parents decided to divorce. This could be referred to as the self-blame phase of possible reactions (Ayolon- and Flasher 1993:44). Symptoms familiar in children include physical headaches, stomachaches and nausea. Nightmares and verbal expressions of guilt are not uncommon in young children experiencing parents' divorce. Changes in appetite leading to eating more or less than usual have been observed. Ayolon- and Flasher (1993:44) also highlights that the child's academic performance have often been affected negatively during parental divorce.

**Fourth phase:**

The 4<sup>th</sup> phase (Ayolon- and Flasher 1993:44) is often accompanied by some form of aggression. Aggression towards one parent, other children or any object in the child's surroundings could be channeled as a way of relieving emotional tension and emotions towards the divorce situation. For this reason, it is not uncommon for parents or teachers to observe temper tantrums, emotional outbursts, clinging to a parent or teacher or over-dependency not previously known in the child's behaviour. This could be ascribed to the fact that the child feels unsure of their self and don't have the ability to release the bottled up emotions maturely. When the child is affected with the reality of parents getting divorced, the child's whole world of meaning is disturbed and the child must search for ways of making sense and staying sane in this unknown situation they are faced with.

**Fifth phase:**

This phase is usually characterized by despair (Ayolon- and Flasher 1993:45). The child living through parents' divorce may experience the feeling that all hope is lost or that nothing can change or improve their current, stressful situation. For the child to cope with all the emotional demands during parental divorce, they often show regressive behaviours previously not observed. These regressive behaviours could include any behavior uncommon to the child's age or stage of development like

bedwetting, thumb-sucking, uncontrollable crying etcetera. Psychosomatic symptoms similar to those named in the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase like stomach aches, deliberate wounds and cuts are not uncommon during this phase.

### **Sixth phase:**

The last phase is often reached months or years after the actual divorce proceedings have been finalized (Ayolon- and Flasher 1993:46). This phase is characterized by better coping and adaptation skills and is sometimes never reached by children of divorce. Only after fully accepting and making peace with parents' divorce could the child show open-minded thinking and real coping skills. When children show real coping skills regarding parental divorce they will be open to new experiences and actively show new ways of finding solutions to problems encountered in their daily lives.

In my research, the phases of possible reactions as stipulated by Ayolon- and Flasher (1993:42-46) will be used to build my knowledge of children's experience of parental divorce. Although I will acknowledge these phases, it must be recognized that this will only be used as a theory or guideline and that the researcher knows different children will experience different emotions when dealing with parental divorce. Here I also want to mention that the phases are named in order, but that children may go through different phases at different times, not only chronologically from phase one (1) to six (6). Therefore I will objectively observe all emotions during clay therapy sessions, without preconceptions of the phases.

Table 2.1 Summary of Ayalon's phases of children's reactions towards parental divorce

#### **Phase 1:**

- Phase of imbalance, insecurity and feeling unsafe.
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, sadness & grief
- Separation anxiety & clinginess
- Changes in mood, daydreaming, confusion and disorientation

**Phase 2:**

- Denial of divorce in the form of
  - Avoiding social interaction
  - Avoiding responsibilities
  - Manipulating situations
- Fantasizing of “happy family life”

**Phase 3:**

- Questions and answers why
- Self-blame
- Psychosomatic symptoms like
  - Headaches
  - Stomach aches
  - Feeling nauseous
- Nightmares
- Guilt
- Changes in appetite
- Negative influence on child’s academic performance

**Phase 4:**

- Aggression towards
  - Parent(s)
  - Other children
  - Objects
- Temper tantrums
- Emotional outbursts
- Clinginess
- Over-dependency

**Phase 5:**

- Despair
- Hopelessness
- Regressive behaviour like
  - Bedwetting
  - Thumb-sucking
  - Uncontrollable crying

**Phase 6:**

- Difficult and uncommon to reach by children
- Coping and adaptation skills
- Open-minded thinking
- Open to new experiences
- Investigate new ways of finding solutions to problems

## **2.5 Potential Risk Factors in Dealing With the Divorce**

According to Botha (2003:17) various research done on the effects of parental divorce on young children proved that the children involved all handled the break-ups of their families differently. Every person has individual coping mechanisms and therefore certain risk factors can be highlighted. It should be stressed that these risk factors should only be seen as possible characteristics which could later develop into severe problems, but if a child does have some of these characteristics that it doesn't mean the child will end up emotionally maladjusted. Venter (2005:3) also mentions that the effects of parental divorce will mostly be determined by the child's age, gender, personality and previous stress handling prior the divorce.

According to Smith and Smith (2000:14) the gender issue regarding parental separation and divorce has proved that boys suffer more, mostly because children usually lives with the mother and the absence of the father or male figure in the boy's life have effects on both his emotional and physical adjustment.

As previously mentioned, the change in lifestyle because of less income of one parent compared to two parents prior to divorce will have consequences for the children involved. Mostly it is not just the adults which are affected by less income, but the children involved are aware of the change in lifestyle, usually a smaller house, less spending money, less toys etcetera are experienced by every family member involved in the divorce.

The age of the child at the onset of separation and divorce will have a definite influence on how the child perceive, understand and deal with parental divorce. As Matthews (1997:3) suggests, the younger the child is at onset of divorce, the greater the possibility will be of developing some kind of maladjustment. This could be assigned to the fact that the young child does not yet have the ability to understand or voice emotions experienced as a result of the divorce. This could also be the reason why younger children very often feel they are to blame for their parents' divorce. Research (Kroll 1994; James & James 2000 and Botha 2003) done proved that children often deny parents' divorce, thus leading to not really accepting changes and dealing with trauma of parents' separation and divorce.

When couples decide to separate or divorce, parents must be aware of the negative influence that involving children in marital conflict might have on the child's emotional wellbeing. Venter (2005:5) stresses the huge impact conflict between parents has on the child's adaptability after divorce. The sadness here is that parents often use children to hurt each other, without considering the trauma and damage they are causing their child. When a couple fights about and/or in front of children it can make the child feel more confused, angry, frustrated and depressed (Matthews 1997:3). This is unfair towards the children involved, because they don't yet have the ability to deal with this kind of conflict and could lead to permanent emotional scarring and turmoil (Smith and Smith 2000:12).

Much attention and research has been done on the consequences and effects of divorce on children (Rogers & Pryor 1998:3), but the possibility of including children as active participants in decision making during parental divorce proceedings, is often ignored. Up to date, children are more often viewed as objects or goods in conflicts between parents, who get custody, what visiting rights will be followed etcetera. In this process of creating new rules, dividing property between man and woman, the children's needs, fears and lives affected even more by the divorce are not recognized and often ignored (Butler et al. 2002:11).

## 2.6 Debate On Involving Or Not Involving Children in Living and Visiting Arrangements

In the past, children were often treated according to the old saying of 'children must be seen and not heard' during parental divorce proceedings. This attitude of ignoring children's inputs lead to a big gap in literature when not acknowledging children's parts in parental divorce and in turn not recognizing children's experiences of this traumatic, live changing event. In more recent years, children were only recognized as members of divorce proceedings. The debate on including or excluding children from divorce proceedings and living arrangements will be discussed in the next few paragraphs, as it seems relevant to my study because it will have a direct effect on the child's feelings and emotions regarding parental divorce (Carew 2004:15).

According to Singer (2010:8) this debate can be viewed as a three folded scenario.

- 1) *Critics against including children in divorce proceedings*, especially concerning living and visiting arrangements suggest this may result in disruption of children's wellbeing. I acknowledge that young children are often not able to make their own decisions on with which parent they wants to live with etcetera. When children are captured in this situation, they are often accompanied by feelings of guilt, betrayal and rejection over one or both parents.

As concluded from the literature (Cohen et al 2002:51, Butler et al 2002:20, Basson 2001:25), a possible reason for not involving children in decisions regarding parental divorce may be that parents often do not want to involve and implicate children in their marital quarrels.

- 2) *Critics for including children in divorce proceedings* are of the meaning that children's opinions and desires should be taken into consideration when deciding on living arrangements, visiting arrangements, etcetera while

excluding the parents own conflicts between each other. Cashmore (2003: 33) and Butler et al. (2002: 109) suggest the advantages of including children in deciding on aspects concerning them in divorce proceedings are of extreme value in the long run. These authors found when asking children's opinions on how they would prefer living arrangements, visiting the other parent and all other issues concerning them, their ability to adapt to and accept the changed situation were found to be much more beneficial to the young child (Cashmore 2003:34; Butler et al. 2002:109).

- 3) Although the benefits of involving children in divorce proceedings has been stated in various research (Cashmore 2003; Smith & Smith 2000; Smart et al. 2001; Butler et al. 2002), it is still uncommon in our society to involve children in decisions concerning them in the case of parental divorce. A possible reason for this could be that parents cannot differentiate their boundaries when involving children in decisions concerning them and issues not relevant to the child. This could be ascribed to an inability on the part of the parents to differentiate the boundaries between themselves and their children. Because they do not know where to draw these boundaries, parents make the mistake burdening their children with their own conflict and issues – which are of no benefit to the children.

In this study, these scenarios will be investigated and I will compare the reality of not including or including children in divorce proceedings at the end of my research and draw conclusions regarding this. It will be investigated in the empirical research.

Children involved in parental divorce proceedings are often burdened with parents' conflicts and issues, because parents easily forget that their children are just children and not their confidante with whom they can discuss problems and frustrations. Throughout literature (Geldard & Geldard 2000; James & Sturgeon-Adams 1999; Johnson 2000; Thompson & Henderson 2007) it is not recommended to discuss marital problems with the children involved, as it is not fair towards them to be stuck



between a mother and father's conflicts. Although the strain and responsibility has been proven to influence the child's normal thought- and relationship formation, most parents are still guilty of confiding in their children (Bilotta 2010:3). This makes the child feel insecure and often entails feelings of guilt and anger towards the absent parent without making the child aware that there are always two sides to a story. During my research, I will be particularly observant for any sign of parents confiding their marital problems in their children or telling the children what the reason for the divorce is according to the mother or father.

## **2.7 The Severity of Divorce For the Young Child**

In this research it will be assumed that parental divorce is generally viewed as serious an incident as the "death" of the life and family setup the child once knew. I want to lean on a combination of grief and bereavement theorists' views in order to help the researcher to understand the severe influence parental divorce leaves on a child experiencing the break-up of his/her family. Here I realize that divorce is not death, but throughout literature it is stated that the break-up of a marriage can be associated as having the same severe effect on the child's world of meaning (Foote & Frank 1999:161).

For the research purposes planned, it is important to have knowledge of the five stages of possible psychological processes when going through grief, as first synthesized by Kübler-Ross in 1969 (Kübler-Ross 2005:151). He argues that the person experiencing trauma goes through the five stages as follows:

1. denial,
2. anger,
3. bargaining,
4. sadness and/or depression
5. acceptance.

It should be noted that the order of the given stages above is not experienced in a specific sequence and that the authors suggest that each person may grieve in a different way. *“Our grief is as individual as our lives”* (Kübler-Ross 2005:151). Rado (1993:45) also suggests that children and all people going through grief should be treated uniquely, no matter how similar their experiences may be, because no two people are the same.

## **2.8 Reasons for Choosing the Target Group**

As mentioned in Chapter One, I chose children between the age of eight (8) and eleven (11) years old to participate in the clay therapy sessions.

I chose participants between eight (8) and eleven (11) because conclusion drawn from my literature study proved the written data on children in this age range were not very well documented (Butler et al. 2002: 11 ). The researcher seems to think there are a significant need for capturing, interpreting, analyzing and drawing conclusions on the young child's experiences of parental divorce as seen through his/her eyes.

The participants were chosen according to Piaget's stages of cognitive development (Atherton 2011: 1). Jean Piaget (1896-1980) studied children's interaction and behavior by listening, observing and watching them over decades. He found that children should not be assumed to think like adults (Papert 1999:1). With regard to my research, his third stage of cognitive development namely the concrete operational stage is reached by children between eight (8) and eleven (11) years old. I chose children in this age range, because it is assumed that children of this age can make use of logical thinking in their everyday surroundings. This urged me towards testing to what extent children of this age can make use of projecting emotions into clay.

Table 2.2 Definition of projection

<p><b>Projection</b> derived from a Latin expression meaning “to throw forward.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Designed to provide the therapist with emotions and thoughts from the unconscious mind.</li><li>▪ Projection is defined as a defense mechanism when the person’s<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- unconscious attributes,</li><li>- thoughts</li><li>- emotions are denied,</li></ul>which are then ascribed to the outside world</li><li>▪ Projection happens when a person with problems defend himself against unacceptable impulses within himself by projecting them onto other people.</li><li>▪ For example when a little girl creates a figure girl out of clay and says the girl looks anxious. She is then projecting her own experience of anxiety into the clay sculpture.</li></ul>
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According to the UNISA model of projection (Roets 2011: 2) projection gives the therapist clues of the child’s personality and/or frame of reference. When using projection in therapy with children, the therapist will gain insight into the child’s

- internal world of meaning,
- experiences,
- identities,
- attributions,
- self-conceptions
- life roles.

By interpreting observations from projection, the therapist will have a true reflection of the child’s inner world of meaning (Roets 2011: 2).

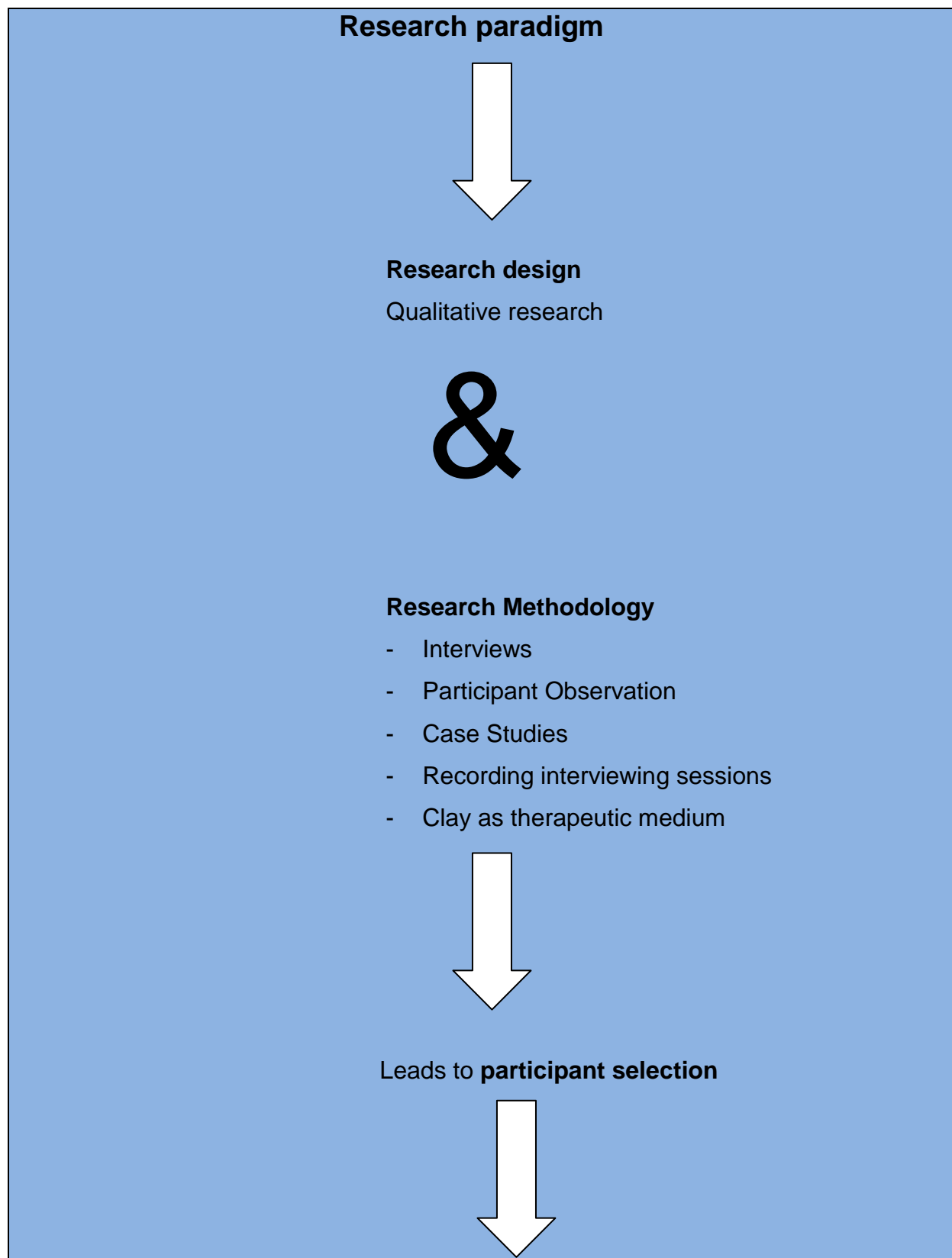
## **2.9 Conclusion**

By conducting the therapy sessions with participants, I hope to establish to what extent clay therapy can help the child experiencing, and dealing and coping with parental divorce and all the concerns associated with the trauma of divorce. I hope to establish a foundation on using clay therapy to release tension and concerns when working with children from divorced homes in future treatment sessions. Hopefully the mastery of the clay could mean the mastery of realizing, naming, investigating and dealing with issues concerning parental divorce and in turn equipping the young child with better life skills to deal with similar distressing situations.

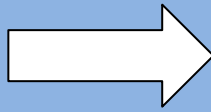
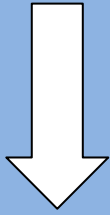
In the next chapter, I will explain in more detail exactly how and why each facet of this research study will be followed through in order to equip with the best information from participant's interaction with clay regarding parental divorce.

## CHAPTER 3:

### Research Method and Data Collection:



## Research Methods



What I plan to do regarding research methods I will use in my dissertation and why it best suite my study

### ✓ **Sampling strategy:**

- Who will be included in my study and why
- Explanation of sampling – in my study concerning children from divorced homes = probability sampling
- Specific sampling = children from divorced homes between 8 and 11 years in Klein Windhoek

### ✓ **Data analysis**

### ✓ **Research ethics**

**“Anyone who doesn’t develop the art of observation is missing the fullness of life” (Cury 2011:44)**



## Introduction

Although divorce is such a common aspect in today's life, all educational professionals should be aware that each divorce and each child involved in divorce are different. Each facet, from the start of parents' marriage breaking up to when the post legal divorce proceedings are finalized, is separate and how parents handle each facet of divorce will greatly affect all those involved in the family setup. The way children react and deal with this traumatic incident will also differ significantly, even though the children grow up in the same house. The individuality and history of the child's way of dealing with stress and change will directly influence how the child will experience the divorce (Basson 2001:37).

After I became aware of the very high frequency of children coming from divorced and broken homes in the school I taught at, I started wondering in what way I could possibly gather more information on what young children experience when parents decide to get divorced.

Through the review study done in Chapter Two, I became aware of the fact that young children's experiences of parents' divorce are only vaguely available in most

work. As discussed in Chapter One and Two, the absence of young children's experiences of divorce could be assigned to the fact that many young children do not know how to express verbally what the emotion they are experiencing feels like. These unspoken emotions and feelings could suppress the child's spontaneous reactions and could restrict the child's handling of the trauma and adapting to the new, unfamiliar surroundings and life after divorce.

The little information known about young children's emotional world made me realize that I want to investigate other ways of accommodating the young child experiencing trauma. I decided to first search for ways which take the child's emotional and cognitive level of development into account and I was drawn to Piaget's work on young children's experiences of the world around them.

In this Chapter I will describe the research method that will be used in this study. As suggested by Mouton (2001:55) I will make use of information founded on basic knowledge from research previously done concerning divorce, young children and clay therapy, in order to gain better understanding, widen knowledge on the research topic and enable me to assist young children from divorced homes to cope better by means of clay therapy in the future.

### **3.1 Research Design, Methodology and Participant Selection**

**“Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln 2003)**

My specific research designs and methodology chosen for this research study will now be discussed, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research designs and methodology thereafter.



Qualitative research was selected for my research because it gives the researcher the chance to examine issues, thoughts and emotions in more detail and in greater depth. As stated by Anderson (2010: 1), when using qualitative research the chance of obtaining better quality data from human experiences are better suited than when using quantitative research methods in this specific study.

In my research, I chose qualitative research as it best fits my research aims and would be the most effective to obtain data regarding my research questions. I will make use of information obtained during clay therapy sessions and interviews with twelve (12) case study participants. I want to investigate the use of clay as therapeutic medium when dealing with young children from divorced homes. Clay as therapeutic medium was selected because it could help the young child to express experiences better than verbal communication. I chose participants between the ages of eight (8) and eleven (11) years because it became evident from my literature study that the experiences of young children in this age group in terms of their parents' divorce are the least captured. By doing this study, I hope to help young children between these ages to give voice to their experiences of divorce. With the information gathered from the interviews and therapy session(s), I hope to gain better knowledge of the young child's experience of parents' divorce. With the interpretation and analysis of this information I hope to make a contribution towards future treatment and the understanding of the young child's view of parental divorce and the life changes brought about by the break-up of the family. I want to view, observe and use probing questions concerning participants' individual situations and record all verbal and non-verbal behaviour evident during therapeutic sessions.

The use of interviewing as research technique will assist the researcher to gain insight into the participant's attitudes, ways of thinking and in-depth information regarding the experience of parents' divorce in this specific study. This in-depth information could be employed by the researcher to explore other relevant thoughts and feelings or to confirm a pre-stated fact regarding the research problem. Research has shown a number of reliable responses are collected during interviewing (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2002: 138; Data Collection Strategies 2009:3)

Although my research will be done qualitatively, thus focusing on only a few participants chosen, I am aware of the fact that individual, one-on-one interviewing and data analysis might be very time consuming. As a researcher using interviewing in my research, I will be aware that young children may react to certain questions the way they think would be socially desirable. Therefore, I will take extra care in unstructured interviewing where the child leads the discussion and the interviewer only confirms what has been heard. I don't want to lead the child in a direction I think would be suitable to my research, but rather just observe objectively.

I am aware of the fact that participants, especially young children, may often not recall all information concerning the divorce and information obtained may need validation. I will pay extra attention in this regard and want to make use of unstructured questioning to fit each individual case better, rather than using a set of preconceived questions while perhaps missing some very useful and important information in sessions.

I chose observation as research technique because it allows the researcher to see what participants do, thereby not only relying on what participants say. With the observations, I want to put myself and other educational professionals into the young child participant's metaphorical shoes in order to try understand how they might have experienced their parents' divorce. First-hand experience could be observed during therapy sessions, which will help me to work with real life data. Observation fits my study perfectly, as it accommodates participants with weak verbal communication skills, appropriate in using with the young child. Thus it could help the young child, between eight (8) and eleven (11) years old, to express emotions and feelings in an alternative manner, rather than having to voice and name these experiences. I know from personal experience that as an adult it is often difficult to express what you are feeling in words. With this research, I hope to contribute to children's ability to work through and deal with emotions concerning parental divorce.

With the recordings made of the therapy sessions, I will look at the verbal and non-verbal communication and observe important cues perhaps missed in the therapeutic sessions. During my research I will focus on keeping a respectable social- and

personal distance to avoid observing participants' sculpting and communication subjectively. In this study I want to stay objective during observation to avoid the intrusion of my personal beliefs and point of view in participants, thus not influencing the research outcomes to fit my preconceived aims.

With the use of clay as therapeutic and/or expressive medium, I hope to attain quality, detailed, realistic data on participants' behaviour, thoughts and feelings regarding their parents' divorce situation.

As this study is of limited scope, I will only be able to use a limited number of participants. This could affect the research outcomes, in the sense that it will only be relevant to the specific population identified during my research. By using unstructured observation and data analysis, the gathering of data is known to be time consuming. The collection of relevant data would be evident in my research study, because of the sensitivity of the participant's experiences. When a participant is discussing difficulties in the sessions, it will be unethical for me to change the topic and get back to my research aims when the child needs support (Gilgun 2005: 45, 46; Data Collection Strategies 2009:5).

### **3.2 Research Methods, Data Collection and Analysis**

In this study, I plan to make use of clay as therapeutic medium to collect significant information from the young child's experience of parental divorce. I will use free expression during the sessions with participants. Using free expression in my study will entail not instructing the young participant on what exactly to sculpt from the clay, but rather leaving participants to sculpt spontaneously. I will however make use of a standard pre-interview list of questions during the first session, because certain background information is important to give the researcher a holistic picture. In the other sessions with participants, I want to ask questions specific to each individual participant's reaction and sculpture to obtain true reflection of their feelings regarding parental divorce.

As seen from the literature review in Chapter Two the use of clay in therapeutic settings with young children is highly effective. In the past clay therapy has been used in a wide variety of situations when dealing with young children. This could be assigned to the fact that children showed a natural, spontaneous reaction towards clay and the “play” factor takes the fear away of the unknown, formal therapy setting. Clay as therapeutic medium has been successfully used with children experiencing severe aggression, ill children (specifically young oncology/cancer patients) and children going through trauma. This is where I saw the possibility of using clay as therapeutic medium when dealing with children’s view of parental divorce. The purpose of clay in therapeutic settings could help children voice thoughts and feelings regarding their parents’ divorce and therefore relieving fears and concerns of the break-up of their family as they once knew it.

The reliability and validity will be determined by past users of clay therapy and observation. As seen in Chapter Two, clay as therapeutic medium has been used for decades with children going through the trauma of death and children with aggression and behavioural problems. The reliability of clay lies in the pleasant sensations experienced which help the child to feel relaxed with the known feeling of the clay used. Clay therefore could act as the medium through which the child might express thoughts and feelings, both verbally and non-verbally. The validity lies in the clay sculpture through which the child could communicate with the educational professional observing the session. The observation of the clay therapy sessions might be influenced by the observer’s subjective views, which would be avoided at all times during this study. Therefore the researcher will pay special attention to the use of objective observation, to avoid personal views and beliefs influencing what are seen during the clay therapy sessions. I will decide the sequence and wording of questions regarding each individual case during the course of the interview and not use set questions before the therapeutic sessions. To increase the reliability and validity of clay as therapeutic medium, I will collect all possible information of clay work before drawing conclusions and assumptions. I will use questioning to substantiate every aspect, before making final conclusions and therewith avoid negatively influencing validity and reliability of clay as therapeutic medium.

The reliability of observation will be realized only by interpreting what I have seen during sessions with the participants, thus not through over- or under exaggeration of any data obtained during participant's observations. The validity of using observation in my research will be proven by questioning and restructuring the information gained from the participant and by repeating in my own words what I understood the participant communicated with me, thereby avoiding misinterpretations.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Observation**

In this research, I will make use of twelve (12) children who witnessed parental divorce, between the ages of eight (8) and eleven (11) years, selected from a local Private school in Klein Windhoek. I will make use of both male and female participants. Two eight (8) year olds, four nine (9) year olds, four ten (10) year olds and two eleven (11) year old children will be used during the clay therapy sessions. The planned clay therapy sessions will be done at school during school hours with the necessary consent from both parents of the participants prior to the research.

Information will be gathered using objective observation during the interviews of the clay therapy sessions. Each individual would be communicated with by means of applicable communication methods suited for his/her unique situation. I will observe and note all verbal and non-verbal information during the session in writing and on video recording. The data would then be viewed a second time after the session by the researcher and another educational psychologist to ensure each case's appropriate information was noted during and after the session(s). The video recordings would be done only to capture verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the participants. This would be done without disclosing the identity of participants to the other educational psychologist or any other persons involved in the research regarding participants involved. Any trait or form of identification of participants would be kept anonymous at all times during and after the research is done. Documentation of what was initially observed and the results of drawing conclusions from therapy sessions would be done to substantiate research findings.

All participants' behaviour, either verbal or non-verbal, will be noted in writing. During the interviews within clay therapy sessions, I will make use of different

communication strategies in order to fit each individual participant's unique way of thinking. I will make use of different interviewing styles suited to each individual participant's characteristics, for example by adjusting my tone of voice, identifying heightened emotions and creating social and emotional comfort during the sessions to ensure each participant's wellbeing at all times. From the information gathered in each participant's sessions, I will formulate questions about certain observations to substantiate what I observed is what the participant meant by his/her verbal and/or non-verbal expression. This would also help to avoid making wild assumptions about data gathered during clay therapy sessions.

All verbal data, tape recordings, written information and observational recordings of the sessions will be done with discretion to avoid disclosing the identity of participants to protect the participant, school and parents from any possible harm.

By being realistic, I am aware that the data which will be used in this study will not be perfect. In the next few paragraphs I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the data used.

A known strength of using observation to obtain information and data from interviews is to enable participants, especially young children, to express a wide variety of emotions through the creation of any sculpture with the clay (Mack et al. 2005:5). The data gathered during the therapy sessions is anticipated to produce enough significant information for me to substantiate and prove the effective value of using clay in therapy with young children affected by their parents' divorce. By exploring the possible value of using clay during therapy with young children I hope to add important aspects for future treatment and understanding of how the young child's life is disrupted through experiencing their parents' divorce.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

I will carefully analyse the data and information collected from the clay therapy session interviews with participants more than once to ensure not overlooking important aspects. I will focus on raw data and observations made during the interviews. Interpretation of observed data and possible themes would then be done

in terms of my research aims. The data obtained from the observed clay therapy sessions, would be dealt with in terms of my research question in order to answer the research questions and through this realizing the research aims stipulated in Chapters One and Three. The evidence from the data should be either positive or negative, in terms of young children's ability to express, in clay figures their emotions concerning parental divorce. This will in turn confirm the research aims of assisting young children to use clay as a therapeutic medium for dealing more successfully with their parents' divorce, thereby resolving possible concerns.

Termination of clay therapy sessions would be done whenever the young participant feel ready to end the session.

I will carefully observe any emotion, for example aggression, sadness and relief, projected into the clay sculpture. I want to observe if young children, between eight (8) and eleven (11) years old, can sculpt feelings into the sculpture concerning their parents' divorce situation. I want to test if clay as therapeutic medium could help the child voice emotions, concerns and questions concerning parental divorce better and perhaps be used with success in future divorce cases. Data processing in terms of mapping the data, interpreting the obtained data and results presented will be done in the analysis stage of the research study (Schulze 2010:11).

Lastly, conclusions regarding my research problems will be made from the interpretation and analysis of the obtained data. Only after all data have been collected, interpreted and analysed can recommendations be made in terms of future treatment and using of clay in therapy.

<b>Strengths of Research Methodology identified for my research study</b>	<b>Weaknesses of Research Methodology identified for my research study</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Observation of clay sculptures and enquiry could give quality information and insight into the young child's emotions and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants may react in way he/she may think is expected of him/her.</li> <li>- Researcher may influence and</li> </ul>

thoughts regarding parental divorce.	become personally involved in the participants' lives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Easy and comfortable access to participants' experiences.</li> <li>✓ Researcher can better adapt to each individual's unique story.</li> <li>✓ Allowing flexibility in each session with participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over analysing and - emphasizing real life situations and observed data.</li> <li>- Irrelevant data would also be observed during sessions with participants.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Better for observing human behaviour individually than in group setting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal beliefs and views of the researcher may influence total objective observation of the participant's clay sculptures and experiences.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Attain better quality, detailed, realistic data on participant's experiences of parents' divorce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interviewing and observation is very time consuming.</li> <li>- Building up trust and confidence in the therapeutic relationship will also take very long before participants will open themselves up towards the researcher.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Researcher can confirm what the child meant by enquiry and unstructured questioning during interviews.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research outcomes will only be relevant to the specific population group participating in the research study.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ By observing the researcher can place oneself in the participant's shoes and gain better understanding of real life experiences and emotions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As a result of limited scope for the dissertation, only a few selected participants can be part of the research study.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Data obtained from research may add to general characteristics regarding participant's age group experiencing parental divorce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drawing comparisons between participants' experiences and reactions may be difficult, because each case differs significantly.</li> </ul>



(Woods 1999:19; Gilgun 2005: 45-50)

The way the weaknesses in this study are addressed will be discussed in more detail in number 3.5.

### **3.5 Limitations of the Research Study**

Qualitative research has various limitations stated in literature (Henning et al. 2004:10). I will only discuss those applicable to my specific research. As a result of choosing observation of young children's experience of parental divorce, the obtained data could be viewed by some critics as based on personal views and beliefs. Anderson (2010:1) suggests that this weakness could be misunderstood and more easily rejected or not accepted by the more scientific based researchers.

Mack et al (2005:1) states that qualitative research is particularly effective when used to gather emotional experiences, culture specific behaviours and opinions. As a result of a limited scope prescribed for my research study, the outcomes and conclusions will only be relevant for the few children, aged between eight (8) and eleven (11) years, in this specific socio-economic milieu. Previously and currently experienced parental divorce will be included within this study.

A child may take more than one or two sessions to unfold true lived experiences. Because of this, the researcher must be very patient when busy with therapy sessions. Also because of the observational interviews used during the sessions, data analysis and drawing conclusions will also take a lot of time to finish. Hopefully at the end of the study, the researcher will prove the true value of using this particular research method in these particular circumstances, even though it is very time consuming.

Another limitation stated in literature (Anderson 2010:1) is that the researcher's presence during therapy sessions could influence the young child's spontaneous reactions. As seen with any one-on-one situational sessions with children, they often

react and behave the way they think the adult present expects them to. This would most probably be seen during my sessions with participants. I chose to do non-directive clay therapy techniques in my research mostly because of this reason. The use of non-directive instruction is hoped to limit the influence the researcher will have on the young participant's behaviour during therapy sessions.

Issues relating to participants' anonymity will be limited before analysing the gathered data for drawing conclusions. Anonymity and confidentiality will be discussed in more detail in the Ethical procedures and considerations section of this chapter.

Evident from the research method chosen for the study, trust could be limited in therapeutic sessions between the researcher and the participants. This is inevitable, because to build trust between the therapist and client takes time, which in this particular case would be very time consuming. As proven with observational data collection studies, it should be mentioned that the lack of trust could influence short-term research outcomes. As my research investigates sensitive information regarding the emotions experienced during and after parental divorce, young children might not feel comfortable disclosing very deep emotions to a stranger, in this case the researcher (Field & Behrman 2004: 23-35).

The young child could have difficulty grasping the concept of projecting emotions and feelings into the clay. For this limitation, I chose children aged between eight (8) and eleven (11) years to participate in my study, because they fall into Piaget's definition of concrete, operational age (Atherton 2011:4). At this stage in the young child's life, they are characterized by showing less inward thinking and could start to express their own thoughts and feelings into concrete materials. Therefore, I hope that the children chosen to participate in my research would be able to project own experiences, thoughts and feelings into the clay medium.

### **3.6 Ethical Procedures and Considerations**

The ethical procedures and considerations are of utmost importance in this study, as I am working with young, under aged children and gathering data on a very sensitive, raw encounter in real people's lives. Before I started planning my research, I

obtained formal approval from the University of South Africa, also known as UNISA, to start planning the study. Prior to my research, I also clarified the nature of my research and make sure all participants and either both parents or legal guardians of the participants understand and know what the responsibilities and limitations of the participants and researcher are (Field & Behrman 2004; Health Professions Council of South Africa 2004:22). The ethical issues will be dealt with in detail in the next few paragraphs.

During this research, the researcher's attitude will be open to any critique or answers from all participants in all sessions. I will act with the necessary sensitivity and empathy regarding each young participant's unique home circumstances. I undertake to always be honest and respectful towards the participants and other persons involved in the child's life. I will be aware of participants and family members' overall emotional wellbeing. I undertake to act with the necessary responsiveness and to be fully present during the course of sessions and thereafter, whenever participants and family members might need me. All information and data will be done with accountability and the necessary ethical considerations as discussed here. In this study, I will work with the aspects of a very sensitive situation in each participant's life. Therefore, as researcher, I will take specific care to treat each case with respect and all participants and/or related family and/or community with dignity. All information and data gained during the clay therapy sessions will be handled with care, safeguarded to protect the privacy of participants and only if really felt necessary, disclosing confidential information with written authorisation and permission from the persons involved. I undertake, should the need arise, to include discussing only information relevant to the study or professional purposes with permission of participants involved (Field & Behrman 2004; Health Professions' Council of South Africa 2004:8).

Before my actual research can start I will firstly select possible participants from a local school where I teach. Secondly, with the assistance of the school principal and school psychologist, I will contact possible participants' parents telephonically. Thirdly, I will arrange appointment times and the meeting venue to describe and discuss the whole research planned in detail with parents involved. Fourthly, a consent letter containing all ethical consideration will be given to possible

participants' parents and a child-friendly assent letter to possible participants. Only after receiving the written consent letters back from both parents and the written assent letter from the child, will I assume the beginning of research sessions with participants.

The consent and assent letters will be edited and accepted by my mentor and the ethical committee for dissertation acceptance before sending it out to parents and children involved. The important ethical considerations concerning the consent and assent letters will be dealt with in my study. I will write the description of my planned research in a language reasonably understandable by the participants and parents/legal guardians to make sure the participants and parents understand what will be done and have full knowledge regarding the research and their children involved in this regard. In the assent and consent letters, I will state that participation of the study will be voluntary at all times and that if a participant feels uncomfortable or wants to withdraw, he or she will be free to do so without punishment or consequences. Parents and participants will also be informed of their right to ask questions and be given relevant answers concerning any activity done during the research study (Field & Behrman 2004; Health Professions' Council of South Africa 2004:53).

I will refrain from entering into multiple relationship situations as far as possible, to avoid the possible impairment of the researcher's objective, competence and/or effective observation during the research study. If for any unforeseen reason potentially harmful relationship arise, I will obey the rules and regulations as stipulated in the HPCSA's Ethical Code of Professional Conduct and terminate and/or refer as seen fit (Health Professions' Council South Africa 2004:6).

I undertake not to make use of any stereotypical beliefs, values and thoughts based on previous experiences. Each individual participant's thoughts and feelings would be treated with the needed empathy and respect. No discrimination regarding gender, race or religion, as far possible, would be done in this research study. I will not record or store identities of participants to ensure anonymity. Sensitive information gathered during the clay therapy sessions would at all times, be dealt

with the necessary confidentiality and anonymity (Christians 2005:149).

As described in Chapter One, I will take special care and all reasonable precautions to avoid any harm done to participants or any other persons involved with my research study. Autonomy and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Participants' identity and unique situations will not be made public in any way for people reading the study to draw connections between the study and individuals in the community. Written consent will be gained from participants and both parents or legal guardians prior to when therapeutic sessions would be started, to ensure the right to do so as stipulated in the Health Professions' Council of South Africa's Code for Professional Conduct (2004:23). Unique case orientation will be done by using open-ended, flexible, unique questions probed during the therapy session interviews. Context sensitivity will be realised by not referring to participants' real identities.

Because I work with people's real life issues, it must be noted that there might arise the possibility for potential harm in my work. I undertake to attempt all reasonable methods to counter act any harm to participants and other relatives as far as possible (Christians 2005: 139).

### **3.7 Conclusions**

As planned, I hope to get significant data from participants to resolve my research problem and to make a positive contribution towards the understanding and future treatment of young children suffering the loss of one parent and life as they knew it as a result of parental divorce.

By conducting the planned research I will also observe to what extent young children, between eight (8) and eleven (11) years old, have the ability to project their inner thoughts and feelings into the clay work. Hopefully this exercise would help the young child to express these unspoken fears, emotions and thoughts without even being aware this is what he or she is doing. I hope that after my research is done, the young participants would feel emotionally lighter and less burdened. With the clay therapy, children could also benefit from the "something to take home" by always referring back to this exercise when seeing it and remembering what we discussed

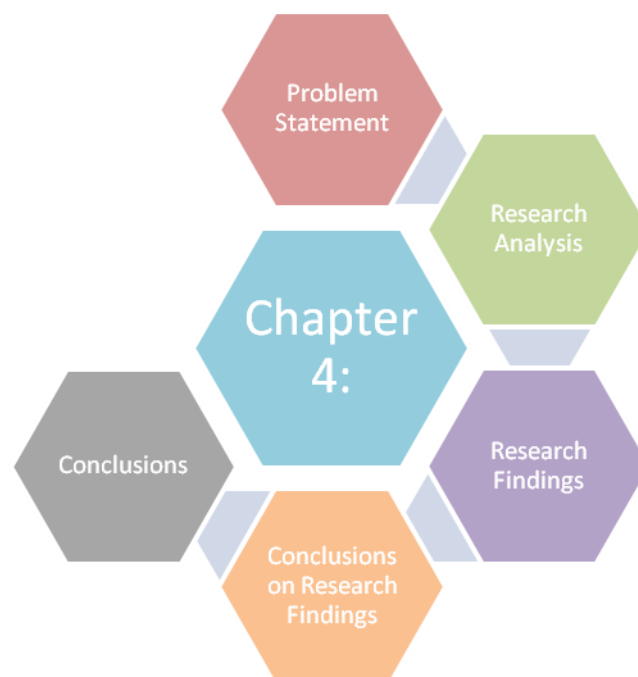
and how he or she has grown in and learned from sessions.

Throughout this research, the focused aim will be to actively enter the world of the young child and come as near as possible to understanding and feeling what children experience when parents decide to divorce. Through this study, I want to assist children in giving them a voice to describe how they are touched by parental decisions for divorce.

## CHAPTER 4

### My Data Analysis and Interpretation of Research Findings

**“Opinion is ultimately determined by the feelings, and not the intellect”**  
**- Herbert Spencer**



### Introduction

After explaining in detail in the previous chapter the method I will use in this research study, I will elaborate more on the findings and conclusions that emerged during the clay therapy sessions with the participants. After working through my research to conclude findings and analysis I would like, above all, to prove my research statement. Reminding the reader of my research statement, the researcher would like to state the aimed research statement of my study again.

## **What is the value of clay therapy with children from divorced homes?**

The definition of proof is quoted “*to put to the test specific assumed outcomes prior the research or to establish the validity of an experiment*” (Lewis 2004 in Hofstee 2006:146). As a result of the chosen research method, I will mainly build the convincing argument on the evidence gained from the interviewing done during the clay therapy sessions with participants.

## **Research Analysis and Findings**

For me as the researcher it is important to mention that the clay therapy sessions was a pleasant experience and activity with the participants and changed my whole perception and feelings towards all children experiencing parental divorce. All participants, with their parents who agreed to work with me, had a marked effect on the outcomes and findings in this research study. Without their considered openness and spontaneous sharing, my research would not have happened.

### **4.1 Research Analysis**

The clay therapy techniques used as projection medium was not as effective with all participants, the whole therapy situation as well as the research methods used, were satisfactory for the purposes intended.

Analysis of most important information observed during the first clay therapy session with participants will now be discussed in more detail.

It must be noted that each participant had some degree of uncertainty of what to expect and seemed unsure of what I wanted from them during our session. It was



observed that most parents informed the child what I will be doing with them and why they were chosen for my research. I collected each participant individually from their classrooms and accompanied them back to their classrooms at the end of each session. In the first session with participants, I discussed the assent form relevant to the child's permission to attend the research study in detail with all the important terms and conditions. After completion of my discussion, the participants got the time to re-read the consent letter and sign if they comply. My intended clay therapy sessions only started after the participant and both parents signed the necessary documents.

With the first session, a short introduction of what will be done and little background was exchanged with each participant, to make them aware of my intentions of what will be expected of them. I asked them questions about their home situations and parents' divorce in general. They informed me of their basic living arrangements, visiting routines and number of siblings, etcetera. After the short introduction interview, I placed a big ball of clay on the table in front of the participant and asked them to create anything they like from the clay. I also took a piece of clay and started sculpting, to make the participant feel more relaxed and at ease in the session.

From the basic instruction of making something, most participants were able to form a sculpture in their worlds into the clay. Only after the sculpture was finished, did I start inquiring about what they made from the clay. It was interesting for me to observe that some participants made two dimensional and some made three dimensional sculptures from the clay given. My conclusion regarding creating a two dimensional or three dimensional sculptures is that each child did what were spontaneous for them to make. No-one asked me directly weather they must make a two- or three dimensional clay sculptures.

During the first session, I observed that most participants found it difficult to sculpt something which makes them feel sad or unpleasant. This made me realize that I should change my instruction in the next session. In the second session I gave the

clay and decided to rather instruct participants to create anything they want to from the clay. This time, most of them seemed to easily create something from the clay, without the fear and anxiety of not making something that I expect from them.

From the clay therapy sessions, the following 19 questions were answered by all participants:

- ✓ Do you know why parents divorced?
- ✓ Were you angry at your parents?
- ✓ Felt sad or cried often?
- ✓ Living with parent of preference
- ✓ Did you have any say in where to stay?
- ✓ Are your parents or one parent remarried?
- ✓ Do you have any step-siblings?
- ✓ Did your parents fight often?
- ✓ Do you know why your parents fought?
- ✓ How did you feel when they fight?
- ✓ Did they know how you felt when they fight?
- ✓ Do your parents still fight much?
- ✓ Does one parent badmouth the other parent's new family?

- ✓ Do you think your parents are better off married or divorced?
- ✓ Were you ever ashamed about your parents' divorce?
- ✓ Did you feel it was your fault?
- ✓ Do you feel that your time is less with one parent as a result of the divorce?
- ✓ Did you ever feel like running away from home?
- ✓ Did you make peace and accepted your parents' divorce?

Although spontaneous interviewing was done while participants created their sculptures from clay, the researcher received valued information relevant to my research. These will be discussed in more detail in the findings section.

## **4.2 Research Findings**

A summary of the most relevant information from the clay therapy sessions with participants given in the following charts:



### Participant 1 = Girl 8 years old

- Snowman, Male human figure, Ladybird, Book and Pen, Angry Monster and Snail
- Emotions = sadness, troubled, worried, stressed, irritated, anger (especially towards her father and males in general), scarred and abandonment.
- Conscious denial of male/father figure in most of her sculptures.
- Relevant Termination - she wants to destroy the angry monster to get rid of anger in her life.



### Participant 2 = Girl 8 years old

- Flower, girl named Jane\*, Hearts, girl (again reflecting herself), Zig-Zag pattern, School and Swimmingpool
- Emotions = attention, love, sadness, fighting, happier after divorce, anger, unhappy at school and with her father - he disappoints her
- Relevant - twice saying she is unhappy at school - should investigate in more depth what makes her unhappy and possible treatment



### Participant 3 = Boy 9 years old

- Couch, Cricket Book, Snake, Gecko and Table
- Emotions = fighting, sadness, crying, love, hate, scarred, anger, sorrow, sorry, madness, relieve, hurt, alone and abandonment.
- Relevant - denial of parents divorce throughout therapy sessions, idealisation of friend's home circumstances where children behave and mother doesn't curse, scream and fight the whole time - should investigate possibilities of changes at home and treatment of his sorrow and worries.



#### Participant 4 = Girl 9 years old

- Cellphone, Pancakes, Red Rose, House
- Emotions = fighting, crying, sadness, upset, shy, anger, scarred, abandonment, alone, cares, loves, guilt, stress, hurt and happy
- Relevant - severe guilt towards both parents, but particularly from her mother, because of what her father did - should treat possible acceptance and realize its not her fault.



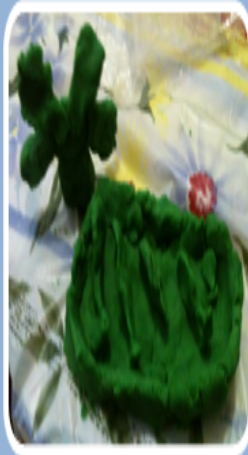
#### Participant 5 = Boy 9 years old

- Springbucks, Orix, Bunnies and Snake Family
- Emotions = anger, sadness, happy, love, acceptance, safe, unhappy and abandonment.
- Relevant - Denial of conflict in life, stating no-one ever gets angry and fight. - should investigate possible acceptance and treatment of abandonment.



#### Participant 6 = Boy 9 years old

- Flower, Dog, Big Lake, Windmill, Wendy-House, Spider
- Emotions = abandonment, anger sadness, crying, happy alone, scarred, and upset.
- Relevant - struggled to project emotions into sculptures, but still rich information regarding his experience of parental divorce was obvious and shared during therapy sessions.



**Participant 10 = Girl**

**10 years old**

- Dam, Nest with eggs, Pancakes and Rock.
- Emotions = angry, love, sorry, scarred, calm, abandonment, lonely, unhappy, fragile, happy, mad, nice, comforting, guilty, excited and sad.



**Participant 11 = Boy**

**11 years old**

- Bird, Mushrooms, Swings, Coffee Table
- Emotions = nervous, fighting, lonely, crying, heart-broken, scarred and ruined.
- Relevant - struggled with projection, only made reality sculptures, but still he named relevant emotions from his own experience of parental divorce.



**Participant 12 = Girl**

**11 years old**

- House, Rose
- Emotions = happy, fighting, scarred, crying, abandonment, love, angry, alone, sad, guilty and friendly.
- Relevant - struggled with projection = possibly might be indication of cognitive abilities, as she struggle to understand the concept of creating sculptures relevant to her own life.

From the above discussion of the clay therapy sessions, it is evident that all participants could create something from the clay given, although some found it easier than others to project their own life experiences into the clay sculptures. Nonetheless, it is very important to mention the calming and familiar effect the use of clay during sessions had on the participants. Although some could project own life experiences more than others, all participants shared valued information and experiences regarding their parents' divorce situation. The clay made the atmosphere more child-friendly and this lead to more spontaneous communication and sharing of emotions and feelings during the sessions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of clay in therapy with children from divorced homes does have value, even if it doesn't realize the projection of emotions into the clay work. The reason for this would be discussed in more detail in the findings section of this chapter.

From the research, the following emotions emerged during therapy sessions:

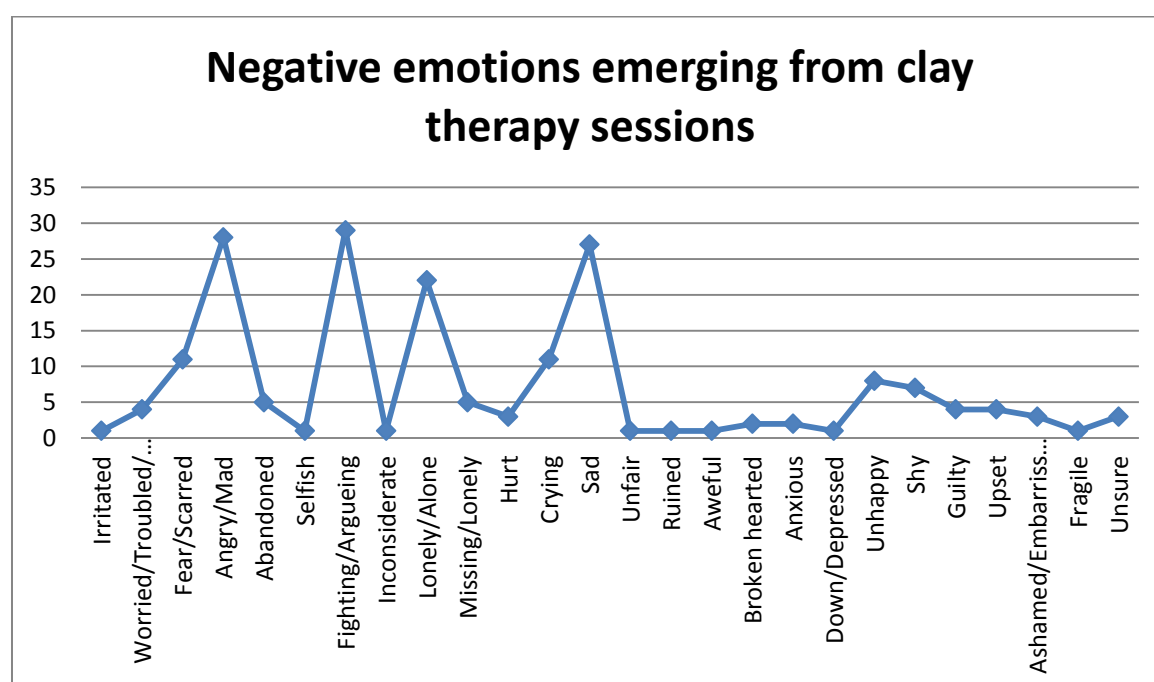
Negative emotions of young child's association regarding parental divorce evident from my clay therapy sessions:

Table 4.1.

Participant Number	Emotion
1, 3	Irritated
1, 8, 3	Worried/ troubled/ stressed
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11	Fear/ scared
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11	Angry/ mad
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	Abandoned
3	Selfish
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11	Fighting
3, 9	Inconsiderate
1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12	Lonely/ alone
4, 5, 7, 11, 12	Missing/ longing

1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12	Hurt
1, 2, 6, 10, 5	Crying
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12	Sad
8, 9	Unfair
4, 12	Ruined
11, 5	Aweful
7, 8	Broken hearted
8	Anxious
3, 6, 12	Down/ depressed
2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12	Unhappy
2, 6, 9	Shy
2, 6, 9	Guilty
5, 6, 11, 12	Upset
2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11	Ashamed/ embarrassed
9	Fragile
6, 11, 4	Forgotton
10	Unsure

Graph 4.1 Negative emotions from sessions





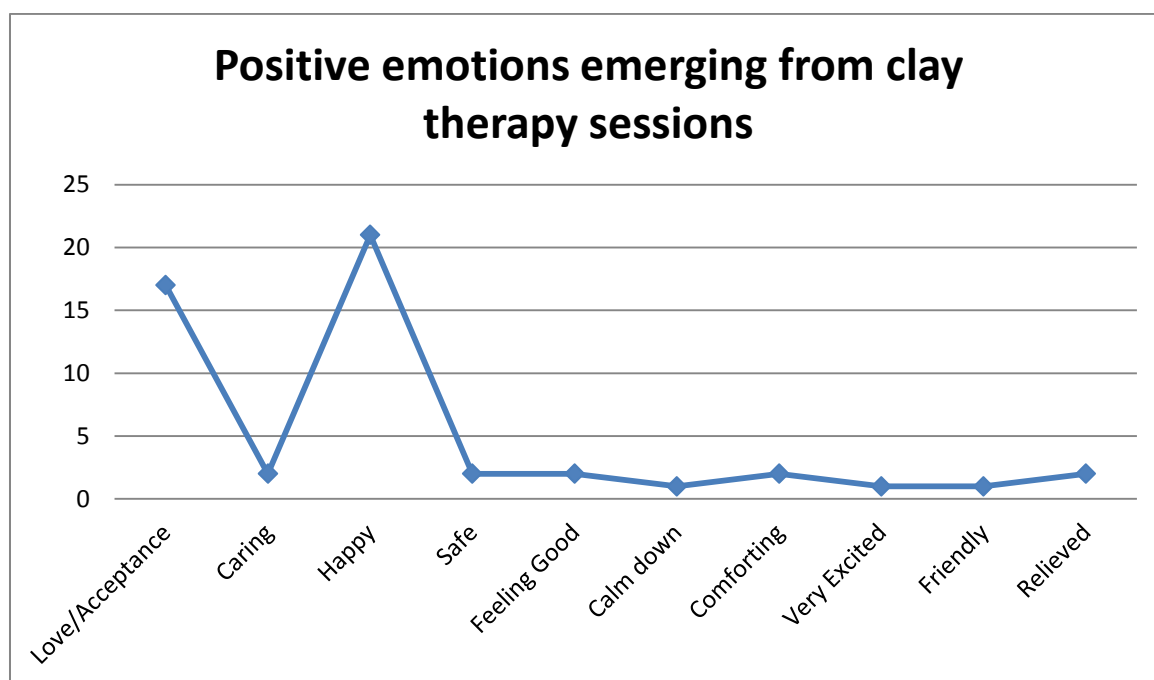
From the clay therapy sessions, twenty-nine participants expressed their experience of conflict in their daily lives. This was followed with twenty eight participants stating them feeling angry at one or both parents for ending their marriage. Twenty seven participants informed me about experiencing extreme sadness because of parental conflict, separation and divorce. The rest of the emotions emerged from the sessions were expressed in less frequency, but still added valued insight into the young child's experience of parental divorce.

Positive emotions of young child's association regarding parental divorce evident from my research:

Table 4.2

Participant number	Emotion
2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 9	Love/ acceptance
12, 9	Caring
1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12	Happy
7	Safe
2, 4, 8	Feeling good
8, 11, 9	Calm down
11, 5	Comforting
4	Excited
8, 5	Friendly
2, 3, 8, 9	Relieved

Graph 4.2 Positive emotions from sessions

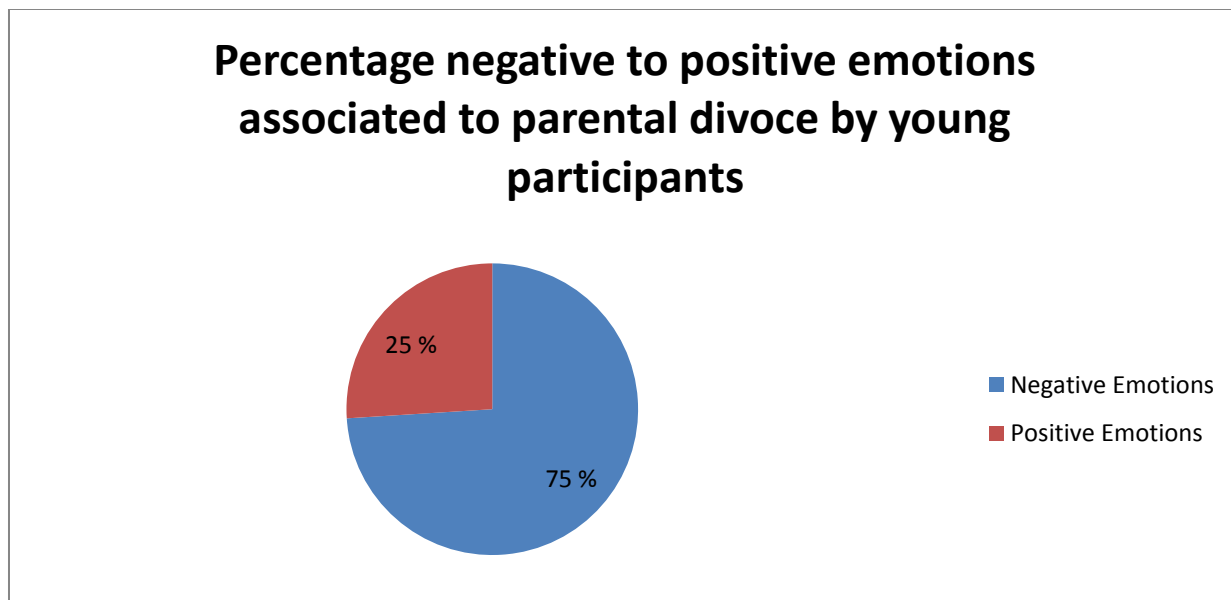


From my sessions with participants, twenty-one children expressed they felt happier after divorce, as the conflict and arguing in their daily lives improved. Seventeen of the participants said they still feel loved and accepted by one or both parents even after their parents' divorce. The rest of the emotions were expressed less, but still gave me marked information into each individual's personal experiences.

Concluded from the clay therapy sessions, it is evident that the participants experienced much more negative emotions than positive. From the sessions, twenty seven negative emotions were named, while only ten positive emotions regarding parental divorce came out. The number of emotions experienced by each participant, could also prove this point. Most of the positive emotions were only mentioned once by one participant, while many of the negative emotions were mentioned various times by more than one participant.

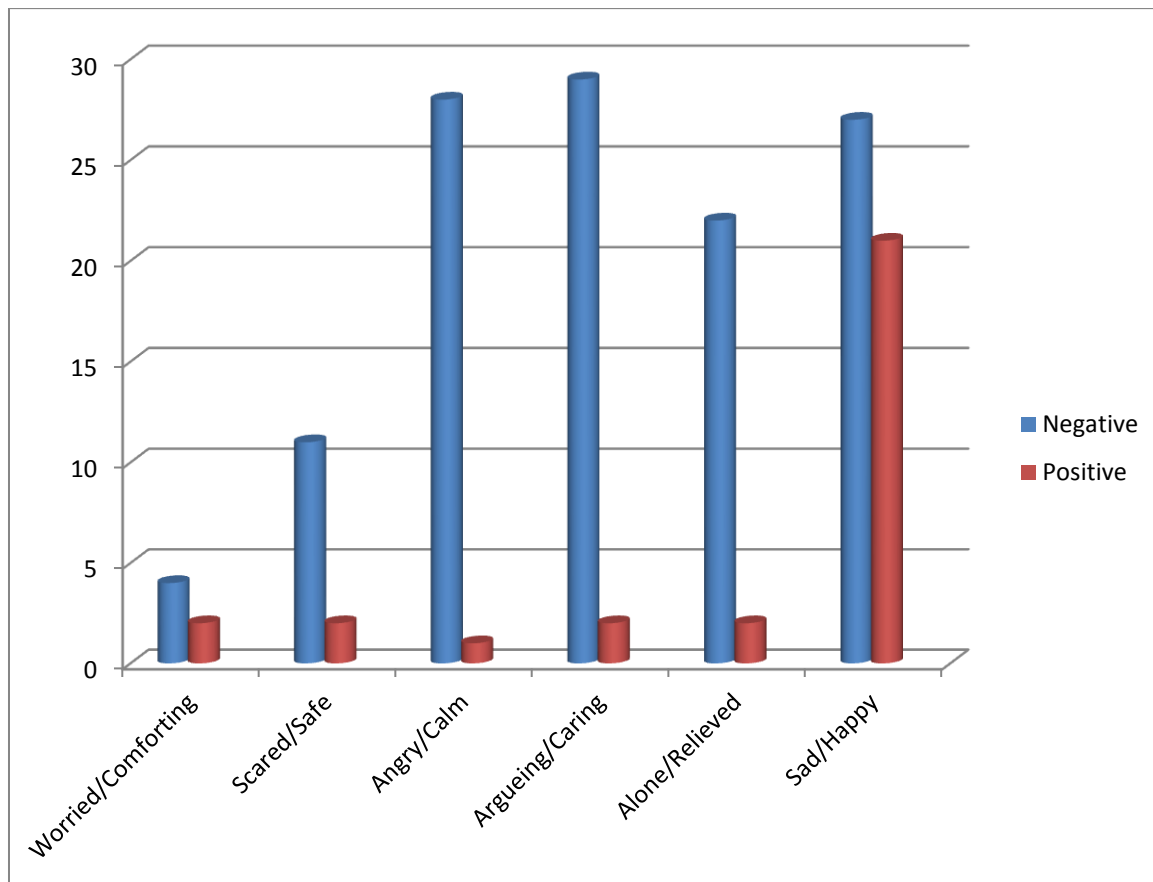
The concluded percentage of positive versus negative emotions can be summarised in the following charts:

Graph 4.3 Comparisson between the amount of negative and positive emotions from sessions



When comparing the frequency of positive emotions to negative emotions gained from the sessions, it is evident that parental divorce effects the young child's emotional wellbeing to a very large negative extent. The total amount of negative emotions emerged from clay therapy sessions were one hundred and eighty six against only fifty one positive emotions regarding their parents' divorce.

Graph 4.4 Comparison of the amount of negative emotions to positive emotions regarding the young participants' experience of parental divorce.

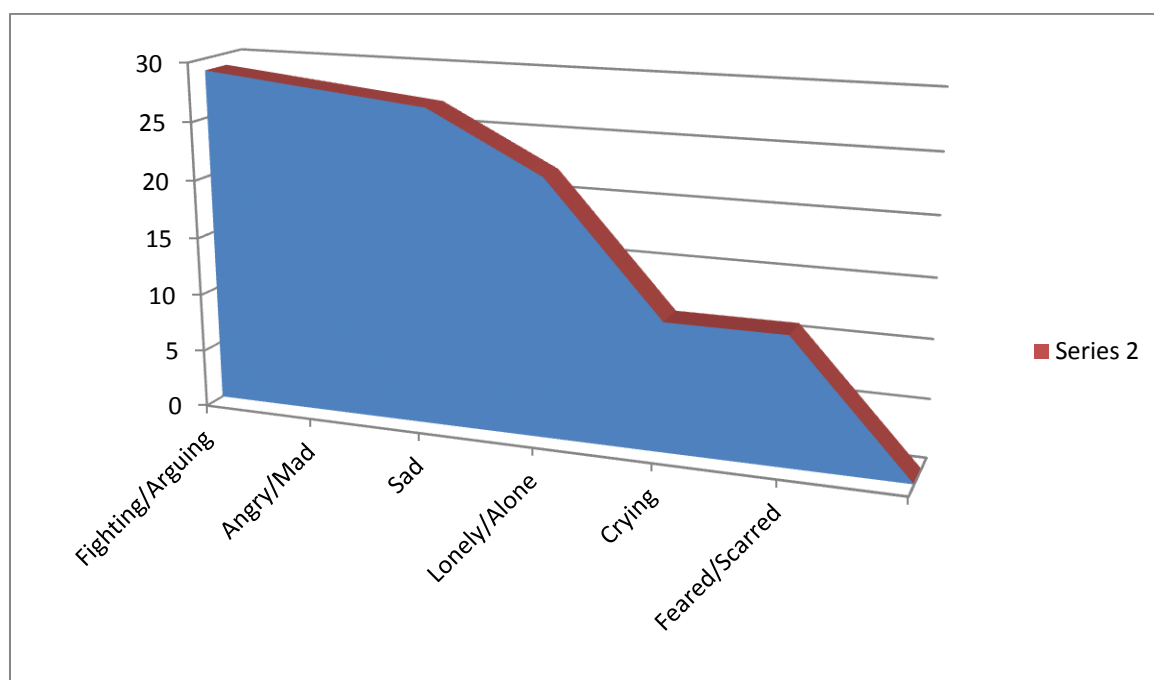


As evident from the graph above, the percentage of negative emotions exceeds the percentage of positive emotions when children experience parents' divorce and break-up. This proves the big need of intervention and assisting young children going through the trauma of divorce.

The six negative emotions experienced most often named by participants regarding their parents' divorce are summarized in table number 4.3

1. Fighting/Argueing	29
2. Angry/Mad	28
3. Sad	27
4. Lonely/Alone	22
5. Crying	11
6. Feared/Scarred	11

Graph 4.5 Most frequent negative emotions experienced during sessions



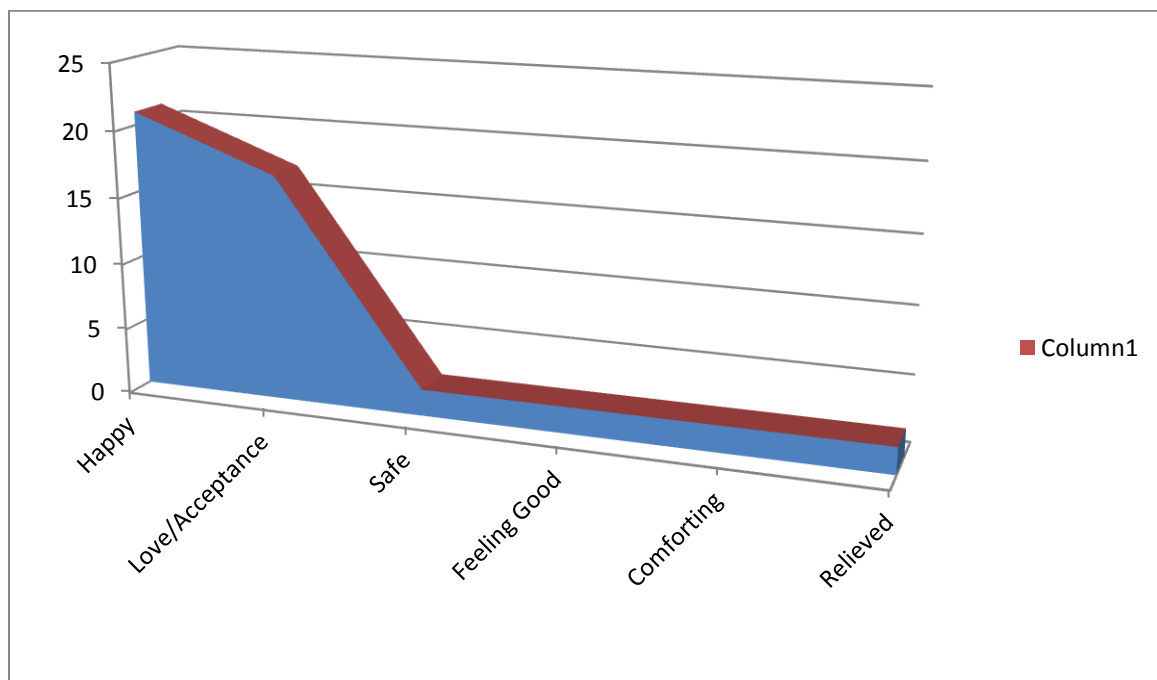
The most frequently named negative emotion was the one sparked by the presence of severe conflict and fighting in the daily lives of participants. It was named twenty nine times during the sessions with participants. Nearly as frequent as arguing from the research is the child's feelings of anger towards one or both parents because they gave up on their marriage and went through with the divorce. The third most expressed emotions evident from sessions were sadness. Young participants informed me that they feel sad about their parents' not loving each other anymore as well as how easily they gave up on each other and their family. Most participants expressed themselves as often feeling lonely, often crying and being scared or fearing their future because of their parents' divorce situation.

The six most often named positive emotions experienced regarding parental divorce can be summarized in table number 4.4

1. Happy	21
2. Love/Acceptance	17
3. Safe	2

4. Feeling Good	2
5. Comforting	2
6. Relieved	2

Graph number 4.6 Frequency of positive emotions expressed in sessions



Most participants said they felt happier after their parents' divorce, because parents seemed happier alone than together and the fighting were less in their daily lives. Most participants also said they still felt loved and accepted by one or both parents after parents decided to divorce. Only a small number of participants expressed feeling safe, good, comforted and relieved after parental divorce.

When taking into account the six most positive and negative emotions named by participants from this study, it is evident that the number and intensity of negative emotions exceeds the positive emotions by far.

### 4.3 Conclusions on Research Findings

As previously stated in Chapter two, research done by Kroll (1994), Botha (2003) and James and James (2000) proved that children might sometimes deny parental divorce in an attempt to adapt to the changes brought about by the divorce in their lives. Interestingly enough, two of my participants completely denied their parents' divorce. This could also be linked to the discussion of Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief, where denial is stated as a defense mechanism whereby the person denies the traumatic event. This is often a natural manner of giving the person time to come to terms with the trauma and dealing with the life changing situation while taking on only as much as the person(s) can deal with at the time (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005: 8).

Anger was the mostly experienced emotion during parental divorce. Again, I want to link it to Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief with regard to the anger experienced here. Kubler-Ross and Kessler explained that the loss and reality of losing someone dear to you, brings on feelings of abandonment and pain which are part of the human's experience of anger (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005: 11). Although abandonment was not one of the mostly experienced emotions expressed by the participants, anger and pain was.

In regard to children's ability to project feelings into the clay work, I came to the realization that the child's age is not the only thing to take into consideration when using projection media. It would seem as if the child's maturity, personality, culture and cognitive abilities should also be taken into account when working with young children and projection media.

The remaining three stages of Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief were also evident from some participants' experience of parental divorce, although not to such an extent like the denial and anger. Bargaining, depression and acceptance was experienced to a lesser degree, although it also came out during my clay therapy sessions. This could starve that divorce, like mentioned earlier in Chapter one, could

be regarded as traumatic and the persons involved might also experience the emotions which goes with the trauma of losing someone to death (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005:35).

During my study, I came to the conclusion that clay therapy works well with some children, but not with all children. The therapeutic value of using clay when working with children from divorced homes evident from this study will now be discussed in more detail.

Table 4.5 Concluded therapeutic value evident from the research

Therapeutic value of using clay when working with children from divorced homes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay took away the unknown, awkward moments and helped children to relax more during sessions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay encouraged some participants to talk spontaneously and share their experiences while creating a sculpture.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay work helped some participants to focus on what they are creating as they evidently put in much thought and effort into creating. These participants often kept quiet during their creation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay therapy sessions gave the researcher a rich insight into each child's thoughts and experiences of parental divorce.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From the clay therapy sessions the researcher also gained other important information about the participants' current emotional wellbeing as well as their fears, worries and concerns after parental divorce.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay gave the researcher and participant the change to communicate in a less threatening, frightening manner than talking face-to-face.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay therapy sessions gave us time to work through all emotions, fears, worries and concerns which the child might otherwise not express.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By using the clay during sessions, the participants could express cropped-up anger and frustration in a safe way of expression.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay therapy sessions gave participants the chance to gain insight on their</li> </ul>



parents' divorce and work through feelings of guilt.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clay sessions assisted each participant to work through unresolved issues and help them realise a better adaptation in their lives after parental divorce.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants could benefit feelings of someone hearing their side of parental divorce.</li> </ul>

As mentioned in Chapter One, the researcher was curious to find more information on the child's experience of parental divorce as seen through the child's eyes. From the first to the last session regarding all participants, it was evident that all the children experienced trauma and emotional turmoil from the moment they became aware of parents conflict to the actual divorce proceedings itself.

Throughout the sessions, it was recorded that all participants, no matter what the divorce circumstances were during the time parents decided to end their marriage, were very much life spectators of divorce proceedings. According to Lewis and Sammons (2000: 24) children are often treated as objects in divorce settling disputes between the husband and wife, while they go through the same trauma, if not worse when parents decide to divorce. My study confirmed this by seventy five percent of participants (nine out of the total twelve participants) in my research stated they had no input on living arrangements after parental divorce.

All participants said that they were very much aware of the conflict and disagreements going on between parents, but nevertheless they did not expect parents to actually get divorced. This proves that no matter how bad the relationship between parents is, the children wanted to believe that they will stay together forever (Orton 1997:46). This denying and avoiding the truth evident from children in the house could perhaps be the human ability to deny danger in order to survive in bad circumstances like these.

From the sessions, it was concluded that only five out of twelve participants (fourty two percent) knew the reason (usually from the one parents' side of view) for parental divorce. This is a positive outcome proved during the therapy sessions, because the less the children are involved and burdened with issues regarding parent's marriage break-up, the less the worries could be on the young child. This said it was shocking to realize how many parents use children as guard to fight with their ex or burden children with negative remarks about the ex-husband or –wife. Sixty seven percent (eight out of 12) of participants complained about one parents badmouthing the other in their company. These participants expressed their distress in this regard as they felt it is unfair to discuss the parent absent from the conversation. As seen in the literature review (Chapter 2), parents often burden children by discussing problems about separation and divorce with children. Children between eight (8) and eleven (11) years old, do not yet have the emotional intelligence to understand and handle such emotional strain. I came to the realization after working with the participants that often parents don't want to discuss issues and problems with people outside the home and therefore they conveniently use children as their vocal soundboard and listening "buddy". No matter how the child tries to stay out of the conflict, they were pulled in with problems not fair towards a young child's maturity. Also, I am concerned that nine out of the twelve participants (seventy five percent) expressed their experience of parental divorce to be "mother says this is life." It saddens me to see such negative outlook on life at such young age already.

As stated in Chapter One, my sessions with the participants proved that children are very much aware of the economic and financial influence the parent's divorce has brought into their lives. Eighty three percent [ten (10) out of twelve (12)] of participants said that their standard of living was severely affected by parent's divorce and that they often have less toys than before parents got divorced. These participants also mentioned the emotional embarrassment of having to get by with much less money, toys etc.

Concluded from the sessions with participants, it showed that eighty three percent (10 out of 12) participants stays with the parent(s) they would like to live with. This shows a contrast of what was predicted in Chapter One's literature review. In

Chapter One, Matthews (1997: 12) suggested that children often don't have a choice to choose with which parent(s) he/she would like to live with. This was not the case with my specific participants. Most of them proved to be happy with the living arrangements and with the custody and living arrangements as they turned out. This said, it should be taken into account; all participants in the study have been children of divorce for at least two years, so custody battles have been fought and resolved with time.

From the clay therapy sessions, I realized after the first session with participants that I would have to steer the topic of discussion in the direction of parental divorce, because they often avoided talking about sad, unpleasant experiences. Although some participants did not project own feelings and emotions into clay sculptures, I can honestly say that I gained a variety of information about each child's experience during the clay therapy sessions with participants. The clay acted almost as a bridge between the unfamiliar person wanting them to talk about parental divorce and them being restricted with most probably the most traumatic event they have ever encountered in their lives.

By playing and sculpting the clay, it made all participants feel more relaxed, safe and after some time they all opened up more towards me. As expressed by Diers (1999): *"expressive art explores the range of human experience by providing symbols which contain the power to evoke authentic emotions."* I think this was again proved significantly by my research. I used chosen questioning for each individual case to guide each child in the direction I wanted to explore. The inviting, relaxing qualities of the clay made this exploration of sensitive information possible. Unexpectedly, I gained much valuable information and emotions while the participants created their clay sculptures. This also added to the value of my planned clay therapy sessions, as it gave me more information while they were busy in a relaxed, non-threatening way. With regard to the therapeutic value of clay therapy, Masters (2005:24) summarized it well in the following statement:

**“Art therapy is based on the discovery of our most fundamental thoughts and feelings which are derived from the unconscious and reach its fullest expression in images rather than words”**

**- Dally 1984, Rubin 1987 in Masters 2005: 24**

#### **4.4 Conclusions**

When taking into account the evidence gained from the clay therapy sessions with children from divorced homes, it is significantly evident that divorce has a severe influence on the child's emotional state of mind. The influence of parental divorce still proceeds throughout the child's life, even in the case of the least complicated parental divorce. Where children of divorced homes are involved, the influence will never disappear and children will grow up adults with issues regarding parental divorce.

In the last chapter, the researcher will take time to draw final conclusions and make possible recommendations of further research on the topic of using clay as therapeutic medium when dealing with children from divorced homes.

## Chapter 5:

### The Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

*“Play is the royal road to the child’s conscious and unconscious inner world; if we want to understand his inner world and help him with it, we must learn to walk this road.” Bettelheim (1987:35)*



## Introduction

In this last chapter of this research report, the researcher aims to present the most important contributions, shortcomings and conclusions achieved in the research project.

## **Problem statement**

**Can the use of clay in therapy when working with young children from divorced homes have value for the involved parties?**

### **5.1 Summary of Findings From Literature**

As mentioned in Chapter One, Matthews (1997) stated the importance of realizing and being sensitive for the emotional stage of divorce when working with children affected by it. This emotional stage was an important part of my research findings, where children have to face the fact that parents' love and affection for one another has now been replaced with negative emotions often accompanied by conflict. It can be linked to the research findings explained in Chapter Four.

Although some participants were able to more spontaneous than other when using clay, the tactile, non-threatening property of the clay put all the participants at ease and definately made the communication flow much more naturally than it would have been, without the clay. This could be supported by the observation of how the participants all came to the first session(s) with definite uncertainty, not knowing what to expect. After explaining what would be done in our sessions, personally and in the consent and assent forms, the introduction to the clay as therapeutic technique had a calming and inviting effect on all participants and took away some of the awkward, unknown characteristics of the session. It should also be noted here that although some participants did not always feel like sharing their experience of parental divorce, much of these unspoken emotions and feelings was expressed through their clay sculptures. Through the unconscious projection of own life experiences into the clay sculptures, rich and valuable information on the children's own experience of parental divorce was obtained.

## 5.2 Summary of Findings From the Empirical Research

It was evident that parents often involve children in conflict between adults. Most participants in my study were exposed to and trusted by parents with emotional turmoil and conflict between them and the other parent involved. This is concerning, as young children don't yet possess the emotional ability to make sense of adult conflict. Parents confiding in young children for emotional assistance and support, does not realize to what extent it troubles the child on a daily basis. It is evident from this study that children are often used by one or both parents to communicate with one another. As the young child has no knowledge of how to make sense of this conflict and blaming, it troubles him/her significantly. One parent may also play victim in front of the young child, worsening the guilt experienced by the child as they cannot interpret what the parent means. This clearly links with Burrett's (2002:210) statement that the amount of conflict evident during parental divorce would influence the child's degree and severity of experiencing long term emotional problems now and/or later in life.

The uncertainty of the young child's future as mentioned by Henning (2005:45) in chapter one was also evident during this research study. This could possibly be ascribed to the fact that the life changing circumstances of a divorce makes any person feel uncertain about their future. It seems as if the hope in children that their parents will get back together does not fade, even if it means the continuing of severe daily conflict. Young participants expressed their wish that things would return to normal, no matter how bad it was. This wish evidently does not fade when one or both parents remarry. Although some participants said they accepted their parents' divorce and realize that their parents are better off separated than together, every participant expressed their inner wish to return to circumstances prior to parental divorce.

The loss children experience as mentioned by Lewis and Sammons (2000:20) in chapter one was also evident in the research study. Participants often expressed the ideal "happy-family" setting to signify what they lost with parents' divorce. Evident

from the projection of their own feelings into clay work, most children either reflected a happy family by saying they just love each other and never fight or some participants just ignored the one parent's existence, saying the father/mother went away or the children don't have a father/mother. This could be linked to Amato and Keith's research (1991: 45) proving that children had troubled thoughts and fears about their own life relationships as a result of trust and/or love broken in parents' divorce.

As a result of not stipulating what the period after parental divorce was when I worked with participants, I could not observe and prove the immediate effects experienced by young children as stated in chapter one (Ellis 2000:26; Henning 2005:47; Hughes 2009:2; Pattern 1999: 26 and Ayalon 1993: 42-46). Some of these effects include shock and trauma after informing children of divorce as well as the immediate struggling with adaptation after break-up of parents' marriage.

From the qualitative research approach used, valuable individual experiences gained by the participants during the divorce process were projected into the clay work as well as verbally shared (Mack, W. et al 2005:1). The decision to sit on the same level as the child also added insight into the participant's life. The method of unstructured observation used during the clay therapy sessions helped me to adapt easily to fit each participant's specific needs and concerns.

As predicted by Skophammer (2000:38) concerning the use of clay in therapy with children, the young participants expressed own life experiences and emotions into their sculptures and it helped with more spontaneous communication and relieving concerns about parental divorce situations. The known, non-threatening and relaxing property (Schaefer 2003: 11) of the clay in the sessions with participants definitely made it easier for the children to share experiences and emotions with me as a pseudo-stranger. From my research, it was also observed that the clay used in the therapy sessions with participants does help young children to better understand and interpret difficult life situations as explained by Anna Freud in White (1989:2).



Concluded from this research study, the most commonly experienced emotions from young participants were:

Table 5.1 Negative and Positive emotions from sessions

Negative emotions	Positive emotions
1. Argueing and fighting; 2. Anger; 3. Sadness and crying; 4. Lonely or abandoned; 5. Scared or unsure about the future 6. Worried.	1. Happy; 2. Loved or accepted; 3. Safe; 4. Comforted; 5. Cared for; 6. Relieved.

As Neuman (1998:267) predicted, children of divorce often experience change in academic achievement, social withdrawal and increased anger resulting from frustration over uncontrollable circumstances at home. It is evident from this research study that most children's academic, social and emotional performance was negatively influenced by parents' divorce.

Interestingly enough, young participants made a definite choice and expressed their feelings about possibly marrying one day the typical, displaying the "happy family" scenario, or to decide they don't ever want to marry. This decision is unlikely to remain the same, as circumstances change as a person develops, but it was worth mentioning the effect on the young child's dream of "living-happily-ever-after."

A quote from Axline (1969:9) is appropriate to summarize my research:

**"Play is the child's natural medium of self-expression."**

**- Virginia Axline 1969**

From the sessions with participants, it is evident that children from divorced homes does show a greater possibility of experiencing behavioural problems. Most of the participants significantly struggle with low self-esteems, aggression, anxiety and extreme self-blame for their parents' divorce (James & James 1999:14 and Ayalon 1993:44).

It was also evident from the clay therapy sessions that participants do experience an initial shock phase when parents inform them about getting divorced as predicted by Ayalon (1993:42). Most participants stated that they had not expected their parents to ever get divorced, although conflict was often present in their households. Anger and blame towards the parent initiating the divorce was also revealed during therapy sessions.

Some participants denied their parents' divorce, as was also predicted by Ayalon (1993: 43) in the second phase of divorce. Here it was evident that children might misuse divorce circumstances to avoid taking responsibility for their own actions and behaviour. Another definite occurrence during therapy sessions with participants was mirroring the "perfect happy family" life, although often accompanied by conflict.

From this study, I concluded that the age of the child's ability to project emotions onto the clay sculptures is not of great importance. It appears that the emotional maturity, personality, cultural background and cognitive abilities have a bigger influence on to what extent children could project emotions and experiences. Some children are never taught to express and identify their emotions and concerns, which leads to difficulty in talking and interpreting the divorce proceedings.

When taking into consideration the objective of this research, it can be concluded that this research did prove definite value of using clay during therapy with children from divorced homes. Not only in terms of dealing with parental divorce, conflict and other life changing circumstances accompanying divorce, but also dealing with other

issues and concerns regarding all areas in life. I observed that young children might better learn skills such as coping with stress and problems in life as a result of voicing and/or expressing their emotions through clay sculptures. I think in our society there is definitely a lack of learning to identify emotions as well as to express emotions significantly. During the sessions with participants, I realized how little young children know about their emotions which made them stressed about the feelings and reactions their bodies had towards unknown situations. The intervention of therapy might be much more successful when children can identify and name their emotions. Thus I would recommend spending more time on teaching children what emotions are and how each emotion feels for them to cope better later in life.

By observing the unconscious projection of the young child's own life experiences of parental divorce, I gained valuable information of emotions, concerns and worries regarding their current life situations. I also gained a lot of unforeseen insight into the difficulties young children experience when one or both parents remarry into other families. This could be a worthy of a new research study, to investigate the influence of remarriage on young children from divorced homes and investigating all the obstacles that play a role in their changed lives, as discussed at a later stage in this report.

With the research done it is clear that my aim in terms of evaluating the value that clay therapy may benefit children from divorced homes to project emotions into clay sculptures as well as receiving extra information from spontaneous communication during therapy sessions was achieved. Rich information was gained on each participant's own experience of parental divorce.

I also observed that most participants experienced emotional relief to some degree from sharing their emotions, concerns and thoughts in interaction during sessions. Concerning the young child's guilt and shame about parental divorce, I think I managed to add more realistic, better coping mechanisms than would otherwise be experienced.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

During this research study, I realized there are a big limitation in the treatment of worries and concerns regarding the participants' experience of parental divorce. Although I did follow up with participants and worked through pressing issues at the time of the clay therapy sessions, I still feel incorporation and development of a proper intervention plan when treating children from divorced homes will be of much value in our society with the high divorce statistics and in the profession of educational psychology.

During the course of my study, I realized that I should have identified children from homes that have experienced parental divorce in the last year or two. This would have made it more achievable for children to recall feelings and experiences of the whole process when parents decide to separate and divorce. It also became apparent that there are a lot of emotions, feelings and personal experiences concerning new stepfamilies and all the issues and challenges going with parents remarrying that should be investigated and addressed.

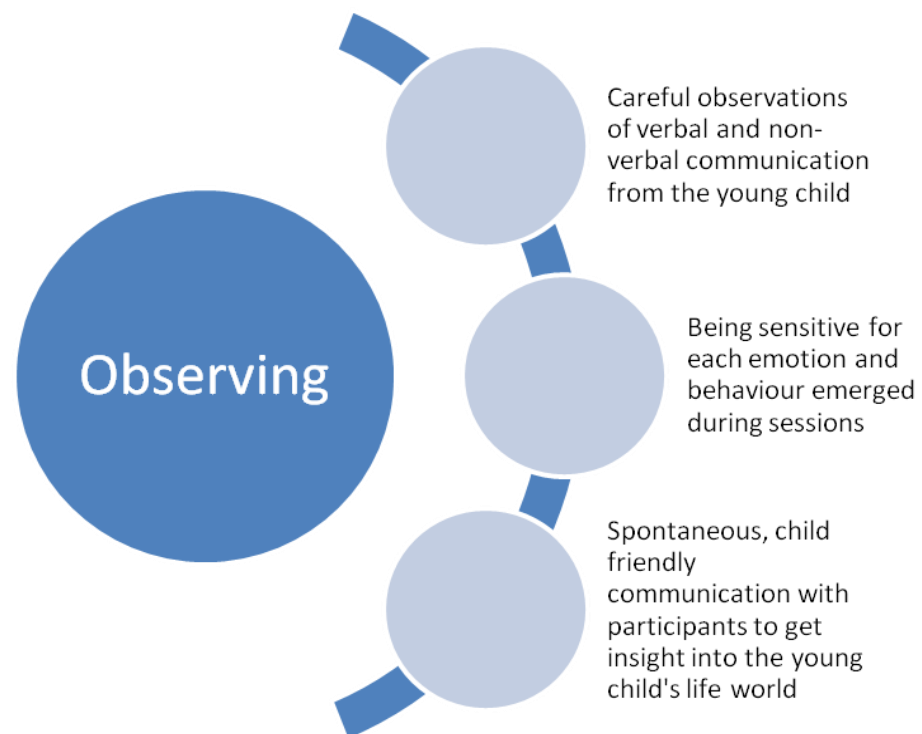
More attention should have been given to the non-verbal communication during my study. During the clay therapy sessions with participants, I chose to write down most of the verbal communication to try and capture every word spoken. Although I thought I'd gain maximum information by this method, some very valuable non-verbal communication was lost. I only realized how much I had missed afterwards when I worked through the video recordings. This should be avoided in similar future studies as I also lost important issues which I could not follow up when they arose.

The findings and conclusions drawn from this study could however not be applied to any general public. As a result of the individualized, personal state of the research it cannot be implemented exactly in every other population groups. Some bare findings might still be used to build specific knowledge on other young children from

divorced homes, for example by observing the family setup they communicate during clay therapy sessions.

Although the clay therapy worked well with most participants, it should be noted that it did not compensate each individual's specific needs. Therefore as with all play therapy methods, trial and error is important to identify and reach each client's own, individual needs.

## 5.4 Summary of Contributions and Brief Guidelines



## **5.5 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research**

It is suggested to study the effect of remarried parents, with or without stepsiblings, on the young child's emotional wellbeing after parental divorce.

As statistics (South Africa 2009: 30) proved that fifty six percent of divorce cases involved children younger than 18 years of age, I would strongly suggest incorporating an emotional support program in schools to assist all children experiencing parental divorce by helping them to adapt better after divorce and remarrying of parents. The degree of guilt most children experienced over parental divorce was previously mentioned in my research. This is troublesome to educators, as guilt over them being the reason for parental conflict in most often experienced. The possible assistance to help young children make sense of parental divorce is therefore a topic more researchable and should be highly recommended to be incorporate in schools (Lewis and Sammons 2000: 24).

## **5.6 Final Observations**

After this research study was completed, I came to the conclusion that divorce does have a huge influence on the young child's emotional state and that it should be handled as extreme trauma in the child's life, comparable with Kübler-Ross' (2005:151) stages of grief. Although participants did not go through all the stages to the same extent, it is definitely a very traumatic experience and does influence the child's whole life if not treated correctly.

As previously stated, the reality of divorce in our society and schools is evident with the children in our classrooms. The severe impact of parental divorce is non-debatable and therefore, independent of what method or medium use, therapy and emotional assistance for young children experiencing parental divorce is of utmost importance. For me personally, clay during therapy with children from divorced homes combined with other interventions will always have indescribable value.

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